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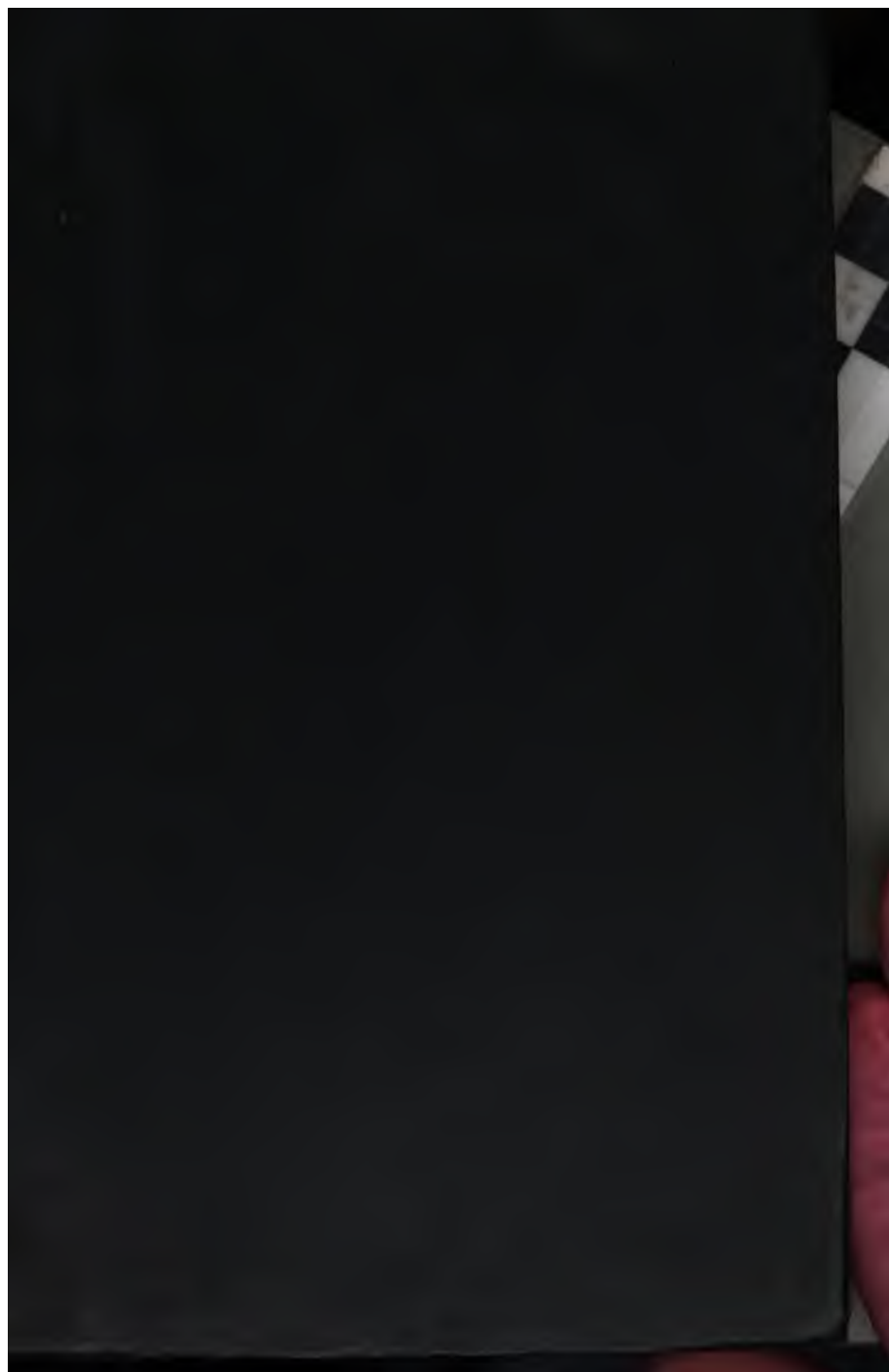
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BY

CHARLOTTE M. YONGE

AUTHOR OF 'THE HEIR OF REDCLIFFE,' 'UNKNOWN TO HISTORY,' ETC.

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THE PRICE OF BLOOD

Ab irâ et odio, et omni malâ voluntate,
Libera nos, Domine.
A fulgure et tempestate,
Libera nos, Domine.
A morte perpetuâ,
Libera nos, Domine.


So rang forth the supplication, echoing from rock and fell, as the people of Claudiodunum streamed forth in the May sunshine to invoke a blessing on the cornlands, olives, and vineyards that won vantage-ground on the terraces carefully kept up on the slopes of the wonderful needle-shaped hills of Auvergne.

Very recently had the Church of Gaul commenced the custom of going forth, on the days preceding the Ascension feast, to chant Litanies, calling down the Divine protection on field and fold, corn and wine, basket and store. It had been begun in a time of deadly peril from famine and earthquake, wild beast and wilder foes, and it had been adopted

in the neighbouring dioceses as a regular habit, as indeed it continued throughout the Western Church during the fourteen subsequent centuries.

One great procession was formed by different bands. The children were in two troops, a motley collection of all shades ; the deep olive and the rolling black eye betraying Ethiopian or Moorish slave ancestry, the soft dark complexion and deep brown eye showing the Roman, and the rufous hair and freckled skin the lower grade of Cymric Kelt, while a few had the more stately pose, violet eye, and black hair of the Gael. The boys were marshalled with extreme difficulty by two or three young monks ; their sisters walked far more orderly, under the care of some consecrated virgin of mature age. The men formed another troop, the hardy mountaineers still wearing the Gallic trousers and plaid, though the artisans and mechanics from the town were clad in the tunic and cloak that were the later Roman dress, and such as could claim the right folded over them the white, purple-edged scarf to which the toga had dwindled.

Among the women there was the same scale of decreasing nationality of costume according to rank, though the culmination was in resemblance to the



graceful classic robe of Rome instead of the last Parisian mode. The poorer women wore bright, dark crimson, or blue in gown or wrapping veil; the ladies were mostly in white or black, as were also the clergy, excepting such as had officiated at the previous Eucharist, and who wore their brilliant priestly vestments, heavy with gold and embroidery.

. Beautiful alike to eye and ear was the procession, above all from a distance, now filing round a delicate young green wheatfield, now lost behind a rising hill, now glancing through a vineyard, or contrasting with the gray tints of the olive, all that was incongruous or disorderly unseen, and all that was discordant unheard, as only the harmonious cadence of the united response was wafted fitfully on the breeze to the two elderly men who, unable to scale the wild mountain paths in the procession, had, after the previous service in the basilica and the blessing of the nearer lands, returned to the villa, where they sat watching its progress.

It was as entirely a Roman villa as the form of the ground and the need of security would permit. Lying on the slope of a steep hill, which ran up above into a fantastic column or needle piercing the sky, the courts of the villa were necessarily a suc-

cession of terraces, levelled and paved with steps of stone or marble leading from one to the other. A strong stone wall enclosed the whole, cloistered, as a protection from sun and storm. The lowest court had a gateway strongly protected, and thence a broad walk with box-trees on either side, trimmed into fantastic shapes, led through a lawn laid out in regular flower-beds to the second court, which was paved with polished marble, and had a fountain in the midst, with vases of flowers, and seats around. Above was another broad flight of stone steps, leading to a portico running along the whole front of the house, with the principal chambers opening into it. Behind lay another court, serving as stables for the horses and mules, as farmyard, and with the quarters of the slaves around it, and higher up there stretched a dense pine forest protecting the whole establishment from avalanches and torrents of stones from the mountain peak above.

Under the portico, whose pillars were cut from the richly-coloured native marbles, reposed the two friends on low couches.

One was a fine-looking man, with a grand bald forehead, encircled with a wreath of -oak, showing that in his time he had rescued a Roman's life. He


also wore a richly-embroidered purple toga, the token of high civic rank, for he had put on his full insignia as a senator and of consular rank to do honour to the ceremonial. Indeed he would not have abstained from accompanying the procession, but that his guest, though no more aged than himself, was manifestly unequal to the rugged expedition, begun fasting in the morning chill and concluded, likewise fasting, in the noonday heat. Still, it would scarcely have distressed those sturdy limbs, well developed and preserved by Roman training, never permitted by him to degenerate into effeminacy. And as his fine countenance and well-knit frame testified, Marcus Æmilius Victorinus inherited no small share of genuine Roman blood. His noble name might be derived through clientela, and his lineage had a Gallic intermixture; but the true Quirite predominated in his character and temperament. The citizenship of his family dated back beyond the first establishment of the colony, and rank, property, and personal qualities alike rendered him the first man in the district, its chief magistrate, and protector from the Visigoths, who claimed it as part of their kingdom of Aquitania.

So much of the spirit of Vercingetorix survived

among the remnant of his tribe that Arvernian had never been overrun and conquered, but had held out until actually ceded by one of the degenerate Augusti at Ravenna, and then favourable terms had been negotiated, partly by Æmilius the Senator, as he was commonly called, and partly by the honoured friend who sat beside him, another relic of the good old times when Southern Gaul enjoyed perfect peace as a favoured province of the Empire. This guest was a man of less personal beauty than the Senator, and more bowed and aged, but with care and ill-health more than years, for the two had been comrades in school, fellow-soldiers and magistrates, working simultaneously, and with firm, mutual trust all their days.

The dress of the visitor was shaped like that of the senator, but of somewhat richer and finer texture. He too wore the *toga prætextata*, but he had a large gold cross hanging on his breast and an episcopal ring on his finger; and instead of the wreath of bay he might have worn, and which encircled his bust in the Capitol, the scanty hair on his finely-moulded head showed the marks of the tonsure. His brow was a grand and expansive one; his gray eyes were full of varied expression, keen humour, and sagacity;

a lofty devotion sometimes changing his countenance in a wonderful manner, even in the present wreck of his former self, when the cheeks showed furrows worn by care and suffering, and the once flexible and resolute mouth had fallen in from loss of teeth. For this was the scholar, soldier, poet, gentleman, letter-writer, statesman, Sidonius Apollinaris, who had stood on the steps of the Imperial throne of the West, had been crowned as an orator in the Capitol, and then had been called by the exigences of his country to give up his learned ease and become the protector of the Arvernii as a patriot Bishop, where he had well and nobly served his God and his country, and had won the respect, not only of the Catholic Gauls but of the Arian Goths. Jealousy and evil tongues had, however, prevailed to cause his banishment from his beloved hills, and when he repaired to the court of King Euric to solicit permission to return, he was long detained there, and had only just obtained license to go back to his See. He had arrived only a day or two previously at the villa, exhausted by his journey, and though declaring that his dear mountain breezes must needs restore him, and that it was a joy to inhale them, yet, as he heard of the oppressions that were coming on his




people, the mountain gales could only 'a momentary bliss bestow,' and Æmilius justly feared that the decay of his health had gone too far for even the breezes and baths of Arvernian to reinvigorate him.

His own mountain estate, where dwelt his son, was of difficult access early in the year, and Æmilius hoped to persuade him to rest in the villa till after Pentecost, and then to bless the nuptials of Columba Æmilia, the last unwedded daughter of the house, with Titus Julius Verronax, a young Arvernian chief of the lineage of Vercingetorix, highly educated in all Latin and Greek culture, and a Roman citizen much as a Highland chieftain is an Englishman. His home was on an almost inaccessible peak, or *puy*, which the Senator pointed out to the Bishop, saying—

'I would fain secure such a refuge for my family in case the tyranny of the barbarians should increase.'

'Are there any within the city?' asked the Bishop. 'I rejoice to see that thou art free from the indignity of having any quartered upon thee.'

'For which I thank Heaven,' responded the Senator. 'The nearest are on the farm of Deodatus, in the valley. There is a stout old warrior named Meinhard who calls himself of the King's Trust; not



a bad old fellow in himself to deal with, but with endless sons, followers, and guests, whom poor Deodatus and Julitta have to keep supplied with whatever they choose to call for, being forced to witness their riotous orgies night after night.'

'Even so, we are far better off than our countrymen who have the heathen Franks for their lords.'

'That Heaven forbid!' said Æmilius. 'These Goths are at least Christians, though heretics, yet I shall be heartily glad when the circuit of Deodatus's fields is over. The good man would not have them left unblest, but the heretical barbarians make it a point of honour not to hear the Blessed Name invoked without mockery, such as our youths may hardly brook.'

'They are unarmed,' said the Bishop.

'True; but, as none knows better than thou dost, dear father and friend, the Arvernian blood has not cooled since the days of Caius Julius Cæsar, and offences are frequent among the young men. So often has our community had to pay "wehrgeld," as the barbarians call the price they lay upon blood, that I swore at last that I would never pay it again, were my own son the culprit.'

'Such oaths are perilous,' said Sidonius. 'Hast thou never had cause to regret this?'

‘My father, thou wouldst have thought it time to take strong measures to check the swaggering of our young men and the foolish provocations that cost more than one life. One would stick a peacock’s feather in his cap and go strutting along with folded arms and swelling breast, and when the Goths scowled at him and called him by well-deserved names, a challenge would lead to a deadly combat. Another such fight was caused by no greater offence than the treading on a dog’s tail ; but in that it was the Roman, or more truly the Gaul, who was slain, and I must say the “wehrgeld” was honourably paid. It is time, however, that such groundless conflicts should cease ; and, in truth, only a barbarian could be satisfied to let gold atone for life.’

‘It is certainly neither Divine law nor human equity,’ said the Bishop. ‘Yet where no distinction can be made between the deliberate murder and the hasty blow, I have seen cause to be thankful for the means of escaping the utmost penalty. Has this oath had the desired effect?’

‘There has been only one case since it was taken,’ replied Æmilius. ‘That was a veritable murder. A vicious, dissolute lad stabbed a wounded Goth in a lonely place, out of vengeful spite. I readily de-

livered him up to the kinsfolk for justice, and as this proved me to be in earnest, these wanton outrages have become much more rare. Unfortunately, however, the fellow was son to one of the widows of the Church—a holy woman, and a favourite of my little Columba, who daily feeds and tends the poor thing, and thinks her old father very cruel.’

‘Alas! from the beginning the doom of the guilty has struck the innocent,’ said the Bishop.


‘In due retribution, as even the heathen knew.’

Perfect familiarity with the great Greek tragedians was still the mark of a gentleman, and then Sidonius quoted from Sophocles—

Compass'd with dazzling light,
Throned on Olympus's height,
His front the Eternal God uprears
By toils unwearied, and unaged by years;
Far back, through ages past,
Far on, through time to come,
Hath been, and still must last,
Sin's never-changing doom.

Æmilius capped it from Æschylus—

But Justice holds her equal scales
With ever-waking eye ;
O'er some her vengeful might prevails
When their life's sun is high ;



On some her vigorous judgments light
In that dread pause 'twixt day and night,
Life's closing, twilight hour.
But soon as once the genial plain
Has drunk the life-blood of the slain,
Indelible the spots remain,
And aye for vengeance call.

'Yea,' said the Bishop, 'such was the universal law given to Noah ere the parting of the nations—blood for blood! And yet, where should we be did not Mercy rejoice against Justice, and the Blood of Sprinkling speak better things than the blood of Abel? Nay, think not that I blame thee, my dear brother. Thou art the judge of thy people, and well do I know that one act of stern justice often, as in this instance, prevents innumerable deeds of senseless violence.'

'Moreover,' returned the Senator, 'it was by the relaxing of the ancient Roman sternness of discipline and resolution that the horrors of the Triumvirate began, and that, later on, spirit decayed and brought us to our present fallen state.'

By this time the procession, which had long since passed from their sight, was beginning to break up and disperse. A flock of little children first appeared, all of whom went aside to the slaves' quarters except

one, who came running up the path between the box-trees. He was the eldest grandson and namesake of the Senator, a dark-eyed, brown-haired boy of seven, with the golden bulla hanging round his neck. Up he came to the old man's knee, proud to tell how he had scaled every rock, and never needed any help from the pedagogue slave who had watched over him.

'Sawest thou any barbarians, my Victorinus?' asked his grandfather.

'They stood thickly about Deodatus's door, and Publius said they were going to mock; but we looked so bold and sang so loud that they durst not. And Verronax is come down, papa, with Celer; and Celer wanted to sing too, but they would not let him, and he was so good that he was silent the moment his master showed him the leash.'

'Then is Celer a hound?' asked the Bishop, amused.

'A hound of the old stock that used to fight battles for Bituitus,' returned the child. 'Oh, papa, I am so hungry.'

He really did say 'papa,' the fond domestic name which passed from the patriarch of the household to the Father of the Roman Church.

‘Thy mother is watching for thee. Run to her, and she will give thee a cake—aye, and a bath before thy dinner. So Verronax is come. I am glad thou wilt see him, my father. The youth has grown up with my own children, and is as dear to me as my own son. Ah, here comes my Columba!’


For the maidens were by this time returning, and Columba, robed in white, with a black veil, worn mantilla fashion over her raven hair, so as to shade her soft, liquid, dark eyes, came up the steps, and with a graceful obeisance to her father and the Bishop, took the seat to which the former drew her beside them.

‘Has all gone well, my little dove?’ asked her father.

‘Perfectly well so far, my father,’ she replied; but there was anxiety in her eyes until the gate again opened and admitted the male contingent of the procession. No sooner had she seen them safely advancing up the box avenue than she murmured something about preparing for the meal, and, desiring a dismissal from her father, disappeared into the women’s apartments, while the old man smiled at her pretty maidenly modesty.

Of the three men who were advancing, one,

Marcus Æmilius, about seven or eight and twenty years of age, was much what the Senator must have been at his age—sturdy, resolute, with keen eyes, and crisp, curled, short black hair. His younger brother, Lucius, was taller, slighter, more delicately made, with the same pensive Italian eyes as his sister, and a gentle, thoughtful countenance. The tonsure had not yet touched his soft, dark brown locks; but it was the last time he would march among the laity, for, both by his own desire and that of his dead mother, he was destined to the priesthood. Beside these two brothers came a much taller figure. The Arvernii seem to have been Gael rather than Cymri, and the mountain chief, Titus Julius Verronax, as the Romans rendered his name of Fearnagh, was of the purest descent. He had thick, wavy chestnut hair, not cut so short as that of the Romans, though kept with the same care. His eyebrows were dark, his eyes, both in hue and brightness, like a hawk's, his features nobly moulded, and his tall form, though large and stately, was in perfect symmetry, and had the free bearing and light springiness befitting a mountaineer. He wore the toga as an official scarf, but was in his national garb of the loose trousers and short coat, and the gold



torq round his neck had come to him from pre-historic ages. He had the short Roman sword in his belt, and carried in his hand a long hunting-spear, without which he seldom stirred abroad, as it served him both as alpenstock and as defence against the wolves and bears of the mountains. Behind him stalked a magnificent dog, of a kind approaching the Irish wolfhound, a perfect picture of graceful outline and of strength, swiftness, and dignity, slightly shaggy, and of tawny colouring—in all respects curiously like his master.

In language, learning, and manners Verronax the Arvernian was, however, a highly cultivated Roman, as Sidonius perceived in the first word of respectful welcome that he spoke when presented to the Bishop.

All had gone off well. Old Meinhard had been on the watch, and had restrained any insult, if such had been intended, by the other Goths, who had stood watching in silence the blessing of the fields and vineyards of Deodatus.

The peril over, the Æmilian household partook cheerfully of the social meal. Marina, the wife of Marcus, and Columba sat on carved chairs, the men of the family reclining on the couches constructed to

hold three. The bright wit of Sidonius, an eminent conversationalist, shone the more brightly for his rejoicing at his return to his beloved country and flock, and to the friend of his youth. There were such gleams in the storms that were overwhelming the tottering Empire, to which indeed these men belonged only in heart and in name.

The meal was for a fast day, and consisted of preparations of eggs, milk, flour, and fish from the mountain streams, but daintily cooked, for the traditions of the old Roman gastronomy survived, and Marina, though half a Gaul, was anxious that her housekeeping should shine in the eyes of the Bishop, who in his secular days had been known to have a full appreciation of the refinements of the table.

When the family rose and the benediction had been pronounced, Columba was seen collecting some of the remnants in a basket.

‘Thou surely dost not intend going to that widow of thine to-day,’ exclaimed her sister-in-law, Marina, ‘after such a walk on the mountain?’

‘Indeed I must, sister,’ replied Columba; ‘she was in much pain and weakness yesterday, and needs me more than usual.’

‘And it is close to the farm of Deodatus,’ Marina

continued to object, 'where, the slaves tell me, there are I know not how many fresh barbarian guests!'

'I shall of course take Stentor and Athenais,' said Columba.

'A pair of slaves can be of no use. Marcus, dost thou hear? Forbid thy sister's folly.'

'I will guard my sister,' said Lucius, becoming aware of what was passing.

'Who should escort her save myself?' said the graceful Verronax, turning at the same moment from replying to some inquiries from the Bishop.

'I doubt whether his escort be not the most perilous thing of all,' sighed Marina.

'Come, Marina,' said her husband good-humouredly, 'be not always a boder of ill. Thou deemest a Goth worse than a gorgon or hydra, whereas, I assure you, they are very good fellows after all, if you stand up to them like a man, and trust their word. Old Meinhard is a capital hunting comrade.'

Wherewith the worthy Marcus went off with his little son at his heels to inspect the doings of the slaves in the farm-court in the rear, having no taste for the occupation of his father and the Bishop, who composed themselves to listen to a MS. of the letters of S. Gregory Nazianzen, which Sidonius had lately

acquired, and which was read aloud to them by a secretary slave.

Some time had thus passed when a confused sound made the Senator start up. He beheld his daughter and her escort within the lower court, but the slaves were hastily barring the gates behind them, and loud cries of 'Justice! Vengeance!' in the Gothic tongue, struck his only too well-accustomed ears.

Columba flung herself before him, crying—

'O father, have pity! It was for our holy faith.'

'He blasphemed,' was all that was uttered by Verronax, on whose dress there was blood.

'Open the gates,' called out the Senator, as the cry outside waxed louder. 'None shall cry for justice in vain at the gate of an Æmilius. Go, Marcus, admit such as have a right to enter and be heard. Rise, my daughter, show thyself a true Roman and Christian maiden before these barbarians. And thou, my son, alas, what hast thou done?' he added, turning to Verronax, and taking his arm while walking towards the tribunal, where he did justice as chief magistrate of the Roman settlement.

A few words told all. While Columba was engaged with her sick widow, a young stranger

Goth strolled up, one who had stood combing his long fair hair, and making contemptuous gestures as the Rogation procession passed in the morning. He and his comrades began offensively to scoff at the two young men for having taken part in the procession, uttering the blasphemies which the invocation of our Blessed Lord was wont to call forth.

Verronax turned wrathfully round, a hasty challenge passed, a rapid exchange of blows; and while the Arvernian received only a slight scratch, the Goth fell slain before the hovel. His comrades were unarmed and intimidated. They rushed back to fetch weapons from the house of Deodatus, and there had been full time to take Columba safely home, Verronax and his dog stalking statelily in the rear as her guardians.

‘Thou shouldst have sought thine impregnable crag, my son,’ said the Senator sadly.


‘To bring the barbarian vengeance upon this house?’ responded Verronax.

‘Alas, my son, thou know’st mine oath.’

‘I know it, my father.’

‘It forbids not thy ransoming thyself.’

Verronax smiled slightly, and touched the collar at his throat.



‘This is all the gold that I possess.’

The Senator rapidly appraised it with his eye. There was a regular tariff on the lives of free Romans, free Goths, guests, and trusted men of the King ; and if the deceased were merely a *lite*, or freeman of the lowest rank, it was just possible that the gold collar might purchase its master’s life, provided he were not too proud to part with the ancestral badge.

By this time the tribunal had been reached—a special portion of the peristyle, with a curule chair, inlaid with ivory, placed on a tessellated pavement, as in the old days of the Republic, and a servant on each side held the lictor’s axe and bundle of rods, which betokened stern Roman justice, wellnigh a mockery now. The forum of the city would have been the regular place, but since an earthquake had done much damage there, and some tumults had taken place among the citizens, the seat of judgment had by general consent been placed in the Æmilian household as the place of chief security, and as he was the accredited magistrate with their Gothic masters, as Sidonius had been before his banishment.

As Sidonius looked at the grave face of the Senator, set like a rock, but deadly pale, he thought

it was no unworthy representative of Brutus or Manlius of old who sat on that seat.


Alas! would he not be bound by his fatal oath to be only too true a representative of their relentless justice?

On one side of the judgment-seat stood Verronax, towering above all around; behind him Marina and Columba, clinging together, trembling and tearful, but their weeping restrained by the looks of the Senator, and by a certain remnant of hope.

To the other side advanced the Goths, all much larger and taller men than any one except the young Gaulish chieftain. The foremost was a rugged-looking veteran, with grizzled locks and beard, and a sunburnt face. This was Meinhard, the head of the garrison on Deodatus's farm, a man well known to Æmilius, and able to speak Latin enough to hold communication with the Romans. Several younger men pressed rudely behind him, but they were evidently impressed by the dignity of the tribunal, though it was with a loud and fierce shout that they recognised Verronax standing so still and unmoved.

'Silence!' exclaimed the Senator, lifting his ivory staff.

Meinhard likewise made gestures to hush them,



and they ceased, while the Senator, greeting Meinhard and inviting him to share his seat of authority, demanded what they asked.

‘Right!’ was their cry. ‘Right on the slayer of Odorik, the son of Odo, of the lineage of Odin, our guest, and of the King’s trust.’

‘Right shall ye have, O Goths,’ returned Æmilius. ‘A Roman never flinches from justice. Who are witnesses to the deed? Didst thou behold it, O Meinhard, son of Thorulf?’

‘No, noble Æmilius. It had not been wrought had I been present; but here are those who can avouch it. Stand forth, Egilulf, son of Amalrik.’

‘It needs not,’ said Verronax. ‘I acknowledge the deed. The Goth scoffed at us for invoking a created Man. I could not stand by to hear my Master insulted, and I smote him, but in open fight, whereof I bear the token.’

‘That is true,’ said Meinhard. ‘I know that Verronax, the Arvernian, would strike no coward blow. Therefore did I withhold these comrades of Odorik from rushing on thee in their fury; but none the less art thou in feud with Odo, the father of Odorik, who will require of thee either thy blood or the wehrgeld.’

‘Wehrgeld I have none to pay,’ returned Verronax, in the same calm voice.

‘I have sworn!’ said Æmilius in a clear low voice, steady but full of suppressed anguish. A shriek was heard among the women, and Sidonius stepped forth and demanded the amount of wehrgeld.


‘That must be for King Euric to decide,’ returned Meinhard. ‘He will fix the amount, and it will be for Odo to choose whether he will accept it. The mulct will be high, for the youth was of high Baltic blood, and had but lately arrived with his father from the north!’

‘Enough,’ said Verronax. ‘Listen, Meinhard. Thou knowest me, and the Arvernian faith. Leave me this night to make my peace with Heaven and my parting with man. At the hour of six to-morrow morning, I swear that I will surrender myself into thine hands to be dealt with as it may please the father of this young man.’

‘So let it be, Meinhard,’ said Æmilius, in a stifled voice.

‘I know Æmilius, and I know Verronax,’ returned the Goth.

They grasped hands, and then Meinhard drew off his followers, leaving two, at the request of Marcus, to act as sentinels at the gate.



The Senator sat with his hands clasped over his face in unutterable grief, Columba threw herself into the arms of her betrothed, Marina tore her hair, and shrieked out—

‘I will not hold my peace! It is cruel! It is wicked! It is barbarous!’

‘Silence, Marina,’ said Verronax. ‘It is just! I am no ignorant child. I knew the penalty when I incurred it! My Columba, remember, though it was a hasty blow, it was in defence of our Master’s Name.’

The thought might comfort her by and by; as yet it could not.

The Senator rose and took his hand.

‘Thou dost forgive me, my son?’ he said.

‘I should find it hard to forgive one who lessened my respect for the *Æmilian* constancy,’ returned Verronax.

Then he led Marcus aside to make arrangements with him respecting his small mountain estate and the remnant of his tribe, since Marina was his nearest relative, and her little son would, if he were cut off, be the sole heir to the ancestral glories of *Vercingetorix*.

‘And I cannot stir to save such a youth as that!’




cried the Senator in a tone of agony as he wrung the hand of Sidonius. 'I have bound mine own hands, when I would sell all I have to save him. O my friend and father, well mightest thou blame my rashness, and doubt the justice that could be stern where the heart was not touched.'

'But I am not bound by thine oath, my friend,' said Sidonius. 'True it is that the Master would not be served by the temporal sword, yet such zeal as that of this youth merits that we should strive to deliver him. Utmost justice would here be utmost wrong. May I send one of your slaves as a messenger to my son to see what he can raise? Though I fear me gold and silver is more scarce than it was in our younger days.'

This was done, and young Lucius also took a summons from the Bishop to the deacons of the Church in the town, authorising the use of the sacred vessels to raise the ransom, but almost all of these had been already parted with in the time of a terrible famine which had ravaged Arvernia a few years previously, and had denuded all the wealthy and charitable families of their plate and jewels. Indeed Verronax shrank from the treasure of the Church being thus applied. Columba might indeed weep for him ex-

ultingly as a martyr, but, as he well knew, martyrs do not begin as murderers, and passion, pugnacity, and national hatred had been uppermost with him. It was the hap of war, and he was ready to take it patiently, and prepare himself for death as a brave Christian man, but not a hero or a martyr; and there was little hope either that a ransom so considerable as the rank of the parties would require could be raised without the aid of the *Æmilii*, or that, even if it were, the fierce old father would accept it. The more civilised Goths, whose families had ranged Italy, Spain, and Aquitaine for two or three generations, made murder the matter of bargain that had shocked *Æmilius*; but this was an old man from the mountain cradle of the race, unsophisticated, and but lately converted.


In the dawn of the summer morning Bishop Sidonius celebrated the Holy Eucharist for the mournful family in the oratory, a vaulted chamber underground, which had served the same purpose in the days of persecution, and had the ashes of two tortured martyrs of the *Æmilian* household, mistress and slave, enshrined together beneath the altar, which had since been richly inlaid with coloured marble.



Afterwards a morning meal was served for Verronax and for the elder Æmilius, who intended to accompany him on his sad journey to Bordigala, where the King and the father of Odorik were known to be at the time. Sidonius, who knew himself to have some interest with Euric, would fain have gone with them, but his broken health rendered a rapid journey impossible, and he hoped to serve the friends better by remaining to console the two women, and to endeavour to collect the wehrgeld in case it should be accepted.

The farewells, owing to the Roman dignity of Æmilius and the proud self-respect of the Arvernian, were more calm than had been feared. Even thus, thought Sidonius, must Vercingetorix have looked when he mounted his horse and rode from his lines at Alesia to save his people, by swelling Cæsar's triumph and dying beneath the Capitol. Oh, *absit omen!* Columba was borne up by hopes which Verronax would not dash to the ground, and she received his embrace with steadfast, though brimming eyes, and an assurance that she would pray without ceasing.

Lucius was not to be found, having no doubt gone forward, intending to direct his friend on his journey,



and there part with him ; but the saddest part of the whole was the passionate wailings and bemoanings of the remnants of his clan. One of his attendants had carried the tidings ; wild Keltic men and women had come down for one last sight of their Fearnagh MacFearccadorigh, as they called him by his true Gaulish name—passionately kissing his hands and the hem of his mantle, beating their breasts amid howls of lamentation, and throwing themselves in his path, as, with the high spirit which could not brook to be fetched as a criminal, he made his way to the gate.

Mounted on two strong mules, the only animals serviceable in the mountain paths, the Senator and Verronax passed the gate, Marcus walking beside them.

‘We are beforehand with the Goth,’ said Verronax, as he came out.

‘Lazy hounds!’ said Marcus. ‘Their sentinels have vanished. It would serve them right if thou didst speed over the border to the Burgundians!’

‘I shall have a laugh at old Meinhard,’ said Verronax. ‘Little he knows of discipline.’

‘No doubt they have had a great lyke wake, as they barbarously call their obsequies,’ said the Senator, ‘and are sleeping off their liquor.’

‘We will rouse them,’ said the Arvernian; ‘it will be better than startling poor Columba.’

So on they moved, the wildly-clad, barefooted Gauls, with locks streaming in the wind, still keeping in the rear. They reached the long, low farm-buildings belonging to Deodatus, a half-bred Roman Gaul, with a large vineyard and numerous herds of cattle. The place was wonderfully quiet. The Goths seemed to be indulging in very sound slumbers after their carouse, for nothing was to be seen but the slaves coming in with bowls of milk from the cattle. Some of them must have given notice of the approach of the Senator, for Deodatus came to his door with the salutation, ‘*Ave clarissime!*’ and then stood staring at Verronax, apparently petrified with wonder; and as the young chief demanded where was Meinhard, he broke forth—

‘Does his nobility ask me? It is two hours since every Goth quitted the place, except the dead man in the house of the widow Dubhina, and we are breathing freely for once in our lives. Up they went towards the Æmilian villa with clamour and threats enough to make one’s blood run cold, and they must be far on their way to Bordigala Gergovia by this time.’

‘His nobility must have passed through their



midst unseen and unheard !' cried old Julitta, a hard-working, dried-up woman, clasping her sinewy, wrinkled hands ; 'a miracle, and no wonder, since our holy Bishop has returned.'


The excitable household was on the point of breaking out into acclamation, but Verronax exclaimed : 'Silence, children ! Miracles are not for the bloodguilty. If it be, as I fear, they have met Lucius and seized him in my stead, we must push on at once to save him.'

'Meinhard could not mistake your persons,' returned Æmilius ; but while he was speaking, a messenger came up and put into his hand one of the waxen tablets on which notes were written—

L. ÆM. VIC. TO M. ÆM. VIC. S. Q.,—Pardon and bless thy son. Meinhard assures me that I shall be accepted as equal in birth and accessory to the deed. Remember Columba and the value of Verronax's life, and let me save him. Consent and hold him back. Greet all the dear ones.—*Vale.*

The little tablet could hold no more than this—almost every word curtailed. The Senator's firm lip quivered at last as he exclaimed, 'My brave son. Thus does he redeem his father's rash oath !'

Verronax, whose Roman breeding had held his impulsive Keltic nature in check as long as it was




only himself that was in danger, now broke into loud weeping—

‘My Lucius! my brother beloved! and didst thou deem Arvernian honour fallen so low that I could brook such a sacrifice? Let us hasten on instantly, my father, while yet it is time!’

It would have been impossible to withhold him, and Marcus returned with the strange tidings, while his father and Verronax set forth with a few servants, mounted like themselves on mules, to reach the broad Roman road that led from Gergovia to Bordigala. Three wild, barefooted Gauls of Verronax’s clan shook their heads at all his attempts to send them home, and went running along after him with the same fidelity as poor Celer, whom he had left tied up at the villa as his parting gift to little Victorinus, but who had broken loose, and came bounding to his master, caressing him with nose and tongue at their first halt.

There had been, as in all Roman roads, regular posting stations at intervals along the way, where horses and mules could be hired, but the troubles of the Empire, invasion, and scarcity had greatly disturbed the system. Many of the stations were deserted, and at others either the whole of the animals, or all the



fleeter ones, had been taken up by Meinhard and his convoy. Indeed it almost seemed that not only Lucius was anxious not to be overtaken, but that Meinhard was forwarding his endeavours to consummate his sacrifice before the Arvernian could prevent it.

Hotly did Verronax chafe at each hindrance. He would have dashed onwards with feverish headlong speed, using his own fleet limbs when he could not obtain a horse, but Æmilius feared to trust him alone, lest, coming too late to rescue Lucius, he should bring on himself the fury of the Goths, strike perhaps in revenge, and not only lose his own life and render the sacrifice vain, but imperil many more.

So, while making all possible speed, he bound the young Arvernian, by all the ties of paternal guardianship and authority, to give his word not to use his lighter weight and youthful vigour to outstrip the rest of the party.

The Senator himself hardly knew what was his own wish, for if his fatherly affection yearned over his gentle, dutiful, studious Lucius, yet Columba's desolation, and the importance of Verronax as a protector for his family, so weighed down the other scale,

that he could only take refuge in 'committing his way unto the Lord.'

The last halting-place was at a villa belonging to a Roman, where they heard that an assembly was being held in the fields near Bordigala for judgment on the slaughter of a young Goth of high rank. On learning how deeply they were concerned, their host lent them two horses, and rode with them himself, as they hastened on in speechless anxiety.

These early Teutonic nations all had their solemn assemblies in the open air, and the Goths had not yet abandoned the custom, so that as the Senator and the chieftain turned the summit of the last low hill they could see the plain beneath swarming like an ant-hill with people, and as they pressed onward they could see a glittering tent, woven with cloth of gold, a throne erected in front, and around it a space cleared and guarded by a huge circle of warriors (*lites*), whose shields joined so as to form a wall.

Near the throne stood the men of higher degree, all alike to join the King in his judgment, like the Homeric warriors of old, as indeed Sidonius had often said that there was no better comment on the *Iliad* than the meetings of the barbarians.


By the time Æmilius and Verronax had reached



the spot, and gained an entrance in virtue of their rank and concern in the matter, Euric sat enthroned in the midst of the assembly. He was far removed from being a savage, though he had won his crown by the murder of his brother. He and the counts (comrades) around him wore the Roman garb, and used by preference the Latin speech, learning, arms, and habits, just as European civilisation is adopted by the Egyptian or Japanese of the present day. He understood Roman jurisprudence, and was the author of a code for the Goths, but in a case like this he was obliged to conform to national customs.

There he sat, a small, light-complexioned man, of slighter make than those around him, holding in his hand a scroll. It was a letter from Sidonius, sent beforehand by a swift-footed mountaineer, and containing a guarantee for 1200 soldi, twice the price for a Goth of ordinary rank. On the one side stood, unbound and unguarded, the slender form of Lucius; on the other a gigantic old Visigoth, blind, and with long streaming snowy hair and beard, his face stern with grief and passion, and both his knotted hands crossed upon the handle of a mighty battle-axe.

The King had evidently been explaining to him



the terms of the Bishop's letter, for the first words that met the ear of Æmilius were—

‘Nay, I say nay, King Euric. Were I to receive treble the weight of gold, how should that enable me to face my son in the halls of Odin, with his blood unavenged?’

There was a murmur, and the King exclaimed—


‘Now, now, Odo, we know no more of Odin.’

‘Odin knows us no more,’ retorted the old man, ‘since we have washed ourselves in the Name of another than the mighty Thor, and taken up the weakly worship of the conquered. So my son would have it! He talked of a new Valhal of the Christian; but let him meet me where he will, he shall not reproach me that he only of all his brethren died unavenged. Where is the slayer? Set him before me that I may strike him dead with one blow!’

Lucius crossed himself, looked upwards, and was stepping forwards, when Verronax with a shout of ‘Hold!’ leapt into the midst, full before the avenger’s uplifted weapon, crying—

‘Slay me, old man! It was I who killed thy son, I, Fearnagh the Arvernian!’

‘Ho!’ said Odo. ‘Give me thine hand. Let me feel thee. Yea, these be sinews! It is well. I mar-



velled how my Odorik should have fallen by the soft Roman hand of yonder stripling; but thou art a worthy foe. What made the priestling thrust himself between me and my prey?’

His generous love,’ returned Verronax, as Lucius flung himself on his neck, crying—

‘O my Verronax, why hast thou come? The bitterness of death was past! The gates were opening.’

Meanwhile Æmilius had reached Euric, and had made him understand the substitution. Old Odo knew no Latin, and it was the King, an able orator in both tongues, who expounded all in Gothic, showing how Lucius Æmilius had offered his life in the stead of his friend, and how Verronax had hurried to prevent the sacrifice, reiterating, almost in a tone of command, the alternative of the wehrgeld.

The lites all burst into acclamations at the nobility of the two young men, and some muttered that they had not thought these Romans had so much spirit.

Euric made no decision. He did full justice to the courage and friendship of the youths, and likewise to the fact that Odorik had provoked the quarrel, and had been slain in fair fight; but the choice lay with the father, and perhaps in his heart the politic

Visigoth could not regret that Arvernia should lose a champion sure to stand up for Roman or national claims.

Odo listened in silence, leaning on his axe. Then he turned his face to the bystanders, and demanded of them—

‘Which of them is the bolder? Which of them finched at my axe?’

The spectators were unanimous that neither had blenched. The slender lad had presented himself as resolutely as the stately warrior.


‘It is well,’ said Odo. ‘Either way my son will be worthily avenged. I leave the choice to you, young men.’

A brief debate ended in an appeal to the Senator, who, in spite of all his fortitude, could not restrain himself from groaning aloud, hiding his face in his hands, and hoarsely saying, ‘Draw lots.’

‘Yes,’ said Euric; ‘commit the judgment to Heaven.’

It was hailed as a relief; but Lucius stipulated that the lots should be blessed by a Catholic priest, and Verronax muttered impatiently—

‘What matters it? Let us make an end as quickly as may be!’



He had scarcely spoken when shouts were heard, the throng made way, the circle of lites opened, as, waving an olive branch, a wearied, exhausted rider and horse appeared, and staggering to the foot of the throne, there went down entirely spent, the words being just audible, 'He lives! Odorik lives!'

It was Marcus Æmilius, covered with dust, and at first unable to utter another word, as he sat on the ground, supported by his brother, while his father made haste to administer the wine handed to him by an attendant.

'Am I in time?' he asked.

'In time, my son,' replied his father, repeating his announcement in Gothic. 'Odorik lives!'

'He lives, he will live,' repeated Marcus, reviving. 'I came not away till his life was secure.'

'Is it truth?' demanded the old Goth. 'Romans have slippery ways.'

Meinhard was quick to bear testimony that no man in Arvernia doubted the word of an Æmilius; but Marcus, taking a small dagger from his belt, held it out, saying—

'His son said that he would know this token.'

Odo felt it. 'It is my son's knife,' he said, still

cautiously; 'but it cannot speak to say how it was taken from him.'

'The old barbarian heathen,' quoth Verronax, under his breath; 'he would rather lose his son than his vengeance.'

Marcus had gathered breath and memory to add, 'Tell him Odorik said he would know the token of the red-breast that nested in the winged helm of Helgund.'

'I own the token,' said Odo. 'My son lives. He needs no vengeance.' He turned the handle of his axe downwards, passed it to his left hand, and stretched the right to Verronax, saying, 'Young man, thou art brave. There is no blood feud between us. Odo, son of Helgund, would swear friendship with you, though ye be Romans.'

'Compensation is still due according to the amount of the injury,' said the Senator scrupulously. 'Is it not so, O King?'

Euric assented, but Odo exclaimed—

'No gold for me! When Odo, son of Helgund, forgives, he forgives outright. Where is my son?'

Food had by this time been brought by the King's order, and after swallowing a few mouthfuls Marcus could stand and speak.

Odorik, apparently dead, had been dragged by the

Goths into the hut of the widow Dubhina to await his father's decision as to the burial, and the poor woman had been sheltered by her neighbour, Julitta, leaving the hovel deserted.


Columba, not allowing her grief and suspense to interfere with her visits of mercy to the poor woman, had come down as usual on the evening of the day on which her father and her betrothed had started on their sad journey. Groans, not likely to be emitted by her regular patient, had startled her, and she had found the floor occupied by the huge figure of a young Goth, his face and hair covered with blood from a deep wound on his head, insensible, but his moans and the motion of his limbs betraying life.

Knowing the bitter hatred in Claudiodunum for everything Gothic, the brave girl would not seek for aid nearer than the villa. Thither she despatched her male slave, while with her old nurse she did all in her power for the relief of the wounded man, with no inconsiderable skill. Marcus had brought the Greek physician of the place, but he had done nothing but declare the patient a dead man by all the laws of Galen and Hippocrates. However, the skull and constitution of a vigorous young Goth, fresh from the mountains, were tougher than could be imagined

by a member of one of the exhausted races of the Levant. Bishop Sidonius had brought his science and sagacity to the rescue, and under his treatment Odorik had been restored to his senses, and was on the fair way to recovery.

On the first gleam of hope, Marcus had sent off a messenger, but so many of his household and dependents were absent that he had no great choice; so that as soon as hope had become security, he had set forth himself; and it was well he had done so, for he had overtaken the messenger at what was reckoned as three days' journey from Bordigala. He had ridden ever since without rest, only dismounting to change his steed, scarcely snatching even then a morsel of food, and that morning neither he nor the horse he rode had relaxed for a moment the desperate speed with which he rode against time; so that he had no cause for the shame and vexation that he felt at his utter collapse before the barbarians. King Euric himself declared that he wished he had a Goth who could perform such a feat of endurance.

While Marcus slept, Æmilius and the two young men offered their heartfelt thanks in the Catholic church of Bordigala, and then Euric would not be refused their presence at a great feast of reconcilia-



tion on the following day, two of Verronax's speedy-footed followers having been sent off at once to bear home tidings that his intelligence had been in time.

The feast was served in the old proconsular house, with the Roman paraphernalia, arranged with the amount of correct imitation that is to be found at an English dinner-party in the abode of an Indian Rajah. It began with Roman etiquette, but ended in a Gothic revel, which the sober and refined Æmilii could hardly endure.

They were to set off on their return early on the morrow, Meinhard and Odo with them; but when they at length escaped from the barbarian orgies, they had little expectation that their companions would join them in the morning.

However, the two Goths and their followers were on the alert as soon as they, and as cool-headed as if they had touched no drop of wine.


Old Odo disdained a mule, and would let no hand save his own guide his horse. Verronax and Lucius constituted themselves his guides, and whenever he permitted the slightest assistance, it was always from the Arvernian, whom he seemed to regard as a sort of adopted son.

He felt over his weapons, and told him long

stories, of which Verronax understood only a word or two here and there, though the old man seemed little concerned thereat. Now and then he rode along chanting to himself an extemporary song, which ran somewhat thus—

Maids who choose the slain,
Disappointed now.
The Hawk of the Mountain,
The Wolf of the West,
Meet in fierce combat.
Sinks the bold Wolf-cub,
Folds his wing the Falcon!
Shall the soft priestling
Step before him to Valhal,
Cheating Lok's daughter
Of weak-hearted prey?
Lo! the Wolf wakens.
Valkyr relaxes,
Waits for a battlefield,
Wolf-cub to claim.
Friendly the Falcon,
Friendly the Gray-Wolf.

So it ran on, to the great scandal of Lucius, who longed for better knowledge of the Gothic tongue to convince the old man of the folly of his heathen dreams. Meinhard, who was likewise rather shocked, explained that the father and son had been recent arrivals, who had been baptized because Euric re-



quired his followers to embrace his faith, but with little real knowledge or acceptance on the part of the father. Young Odorik had been a far more ardent convert; and, after the fashion of many a believer, had taken up the distinctions of sect rather than of religion, and, zealous in the faith he knew, had thought it incumbent on him to insult the Catholics where they seemed to him idolatrous.

A message on the road informed the travellers that they would find Odorik at the villa. Thither then they went, and soon saw the whole household on the steps in eager anticipation. A tall young figure, with a bandage still round his fair flowing locks, came down the steps as Verronax helped the blind man to dismount; and Odo, with a cry of 'My son!' with a ring of ecstasy in the sound, held the youth to his breast and felt him all over.


'Are we friends?' said Odorik, turning to Verronax, when his father released him.

'That is as thou wilt,' returned the Arvernian gravely.

'Know then,' said Odorik, 'that I know that I erred. I knew not thy Lord when I mocked thine honour to Him. Father, we had but half learnt the Christian's God. I have seen it now. It was not

thy blow, O Arvernian! that taught me; but the Master who inspired yonder youth to offer his life, and who sent the maiden there to wait upon her foe. He is more than man. I own in him the Eternal Creator, Redeemer, and Lord!’

‘Yea,’ said Sidonius to his friend Æmilius, ‘a great work hath been wrought out. Thus hath the parable of actual life led this zealous but half-taught youth to enter into the higher truth. Lucius will be none the worse priest for having trodden in the steps of Him who was High-priest and Victim. Who may abide strict Divine Justice, had not One stood between the sinner and the Judge? Thus “Mercy and Truth have met together; Righteousness and Peace have kissed each other.”’



THE CAT OF CAT COPSE

A HAMPSHIRE TRADITION

I

THE Dane ! the Dane ! The heathen Dane
Is wasting Hampshire's coast again—
From ravaged church and plundered farm
Flash the dread beacons of alarm—

Fly, helpless peasants, fly !

Ytene's green banks and forest shades,
Her heathery slopes and gorse-clad glades

Re-echo to the cry—

Where is the King, whose strong right hand
Hath oft from danger freed the land ?

Nor fleet nor covenant avails

To drive aloof those pirate sails,

In vain is Alfred's sword ;


Vain seems in every sacred fane

The chant—' From fury of the Dane,

Deliver us, good Lord.'

II

The long keels have the Needles past,
Wight's fairest bowers are flaming fast ;
From Solent's waves rise many a mast,
With swelling sails of gold and red,
Dragon and serpent at each head,
Havoc and slaughter breathing forth,
Steer on these locusts of the north.
Each vessel bears a deadly freight ;
Each Viking, fired with greed and hate,
His axe is whetting for the strife,
And counting how each Christian life
Shall win him fame in Skaldic lays,
And in Valhalla endless praise.
For Hamble's river straight they steer ;
Prayer is in vain, no aid is near—
Hopeless and helpless all must die.
Oh, fainting heart and failing eye,
Look forth upon the foe once more !
Why leap they not upon the shore ?
Why pause their keels upon the strand,
As checked by some resistless hand ?
The sail they spread, the oars they ply,
Yet neither may advance nor fly.



III

Who is it holds them helpless there ?
'Tis He Who hears the anguished prayer ;
 'Tis He Who to the wave
Hath fixed the bound—mud, rock, or sand—
To mark how far upon the strand
 Its foaming sweep may rave.
What is it, but the ebbing tide,
That leaves them here, by Hamble's side,
So firm embedded in the mud
No force of stream, nor storm, nor flood,
Shall ever these five ships bear forth
To fiords and islets of the north ;
A thousand years shall pass away,
And leave those keels in Hamble's bay.


IV

Ill were it in my rhyme to tell
The work of slaughter that befell ;
In sooth it was a savage time—
Crime ever will engender crime.
Each Viking, as he swam to land,
Fell by a Saxon's vengeful hand ;
Turn we from all that vengeance wild—

Where on the deck there cowered a child,
And, closely to his bosom prest,
A snow-white kitten found a nest.
That tender boy, with tresses fair,
Was Edric, Egbert's cherished heir ;
The plaything of the homestead he,
Now fondled on his grandame's knee ;
Or as beside the hearth he sat,
Oft sporting with his snow-white cat ;
Now by the chaplain taught to read,
And lisp his Pater and his Creed ;
Well nurtured at his mother's side,
And by his father trained to ride,
To speak the truth, to draw the bow,
And all an English Thane should know,
His days had been as one bright dream—
As smooth as his own river's stream !
Until, at good King Alfred's call,
Thane Egbert left his native hall.

v

Then, five days later, shout and yell,
And shrieks and howls of slaughter fell,
Upon the peaceful homestead came.
'Mid flashing sword, and axe, and flame,



Snatched by a Viking's iron grasp,
From his slain mother's dying clasp,
Saved from the household's flaming grave,
Edric was dragged, a destined slave,
Some northern dame to serve, or heed
The flocks that on the Sæter feed.
Still, with scarce conscious hold he clung
To the white cat, that closely hung
Seeking her refuge in his arm,
Her shelter in the wild alarm—
And who can tell how oft his moan
Was soothed by her soft purring tone?
Time keeping with retracted claw,
Or patting with her velvet paw ;
Although of home and friends bereft,
Still this one comforter was left,
So lithe, so swift, so soft, so white,
She might have seemed his guardian sprite.


The rude Danes deemed her such ;
And whispered tales of 'disir' bound
To human lords, as bird or hound.
Nor one 'mid all the fleet was found

To hurt one tender paw.
And when the captive knelt to pray
None would his orisons gainsay ;

For as they marked him day by day,
Increased their wondering awe.

VI

Crouched by the mast, the child and cat,
Through the dire time of slaughter sat,
By terror both spellbound ;
But when night came, a silence drear
Fell on the coast ; and far or near,
No voice caught Edric's wakeful ear,
Save water's lapping sound.
He wandered from the stern to prow,
Ate of the stores, and marvelled how
He yet might reach the ground ;
Till low and lower sank the tide,
Dark banks of mud spread far and wide
Around that fast-bound wreck.
Then the lone boy climbed down the ship,
To cross the mud by bound and skip,
His cat upon his neck.
Light was his weight and swift his leap,
Now would he softly tread, now creep,
For treacherous was the mud, and deep.
From stone to weed, from weed to plank,
Leaving a hole where'er he sank ;



With panting breath and sore taxed strength
The solid earth he felt at length.
Sheltered within the copse he lay,
When dawn had brightened into day,
For when one moment there was seen,
His red cap glancing 'mid the green,

A fearful cry arose—

'Here lurks a Dane!' 'The Dane seek out'
With knife and axe, the rabble rout
Made the copse ring with yell and shout
To find their dreaded foes.


And Edric feared to meet a stroke,
Before they knew the tongue he spoke.
Hid 'mid the branches of an oak,

He heard their calls and blows.
Of food he had a simple store,
And when the churls the chase gave o'er,
And evening sunk upon the vale,
With rubbing head and upright tail,
Pacing before him to and fro,
Puss lured him on the way to go—
Coaxing him on, with tender wile,
O'er heath and down for many a mile.
Ask me not how her course she knows.
He from Whom every instinct flows

And shield him in the Northman's power
Safe as in Alswyth's guarded bower;
Treaty and ransom may be found
To win him back to English ground.'


VIII

The funeral obsequies were o'er,
 But lingered still the Thane,
Hanging around his home once more,
 Feeding his bitter pain.
The King would fain with friendly force
Urge him anew to mount his horse,
Turn from the piteous sight away,
And fresh begin life's saddened day,
His loved ones looking yet to greet,
Where ne'er shall part the blest who meet.
Just then a voice that well he knew,
A sound that mixed the purr and mew,
 Went to the father's heart.
On a large stone King Alfred sat
Against his buskin rubbed a cat,
 Snow-white in every part,
Though drenched and soiled from head to tail.
The poor Thane's tears poured down like hail—



‘Poor puss, in vain thy loving wail,’
Then came a joyful start!
A little hand was on his cloak—
‘Father!’ a voice beside him spoke,
Emerging from the wood.
All travel-stained, and marked with mire,
With trace of blood, and toil, and fire,
Yet safe and sound beside his sire,
Edric before them stood.
And as his father wept for joy,
King Alfred blessed the rescued boy,
And thanked his Maker good!
Who doth the captive’s prayer fulfil,
Making His creatures work His will
By means not understood.

NOTE.—The remains of the five Danish vessels still lie embedded in the mud of the Hamble River near Southampton, though parts have been carried off and used as wood for furniture in the farm-houses. The neighbouring wood is known as Cat Copse, and a tradition has been handed down that a cat, and a boy in a red cap, escaped from the Danish ships, took refuge there.




DE FACTO AND DE JURE

I

DE FACTO

THE later summer sunbeams lay on an expanse of slightly broken ground where purple and crimson heather were relieved by the golden blossoms of the dwarf gorse, interspersed with white stars of stitchwort. Here and there, on the slopes, grew stunted oaks and hollies, whose polished leaves gleamed white with the reflection of the light ; but there was not a trace of human habitation save a track, as if trodden by horses' feet, clear of the furze and heath, and bordered by soft bent grass, beginning to grow brown.

Near this track—for path it could hardly be called—stood a slender lad waiting and watching, a little round cap covering his short-cut brown hair, a crimson tunic reaching to his knee, leggings and shoes of deerhide, and a sword at his side, fastened



by a belt of the like skin, guarded and clasped with silver. His features were delicate, though sunburnt, and his eyes were riveted on the distance, where the path had disappeared amid the luxuriant spires of ling.

A hunting-horn sounded, and the youth drew himself together into an attitude of eager attention; the baying of hounds and trampling of horses' hoofs came nearer and nearer, and by and by there came in view the ends of boar-spears, the tall points of bows, a cluster of heads of men and horses—strong, sturdy, shaggy, sure-footed creatures, almost ponies, but the only steeds fit to pursue the chase on this rough and encumbered ground.

Foremost rode, with ivory and gold hunting-horn slung in a rich Spanish baldrick, and a slender gilt circlet round his green hunting-cap, a stout figure, with a face tanned to a fiery colour, keen eyes of a dark auburn tint, and a shock of hair of the same deep red.

At sight of him, the lad flung himself on his knees on the path, with the cry, 'Haro! Haro! Justice, Sir King!'

'Out of my way, English hound!' cried the King.
'This is no time for thy Haro.'

'Nay, but one word, good fair King! I am French—French by my father's side!' cried the lad, as there

was a halt, more from the instinct of the horse than the will of the King. 'Bertram de Maisonforte! My father married the Lady of Boyatt, and her inheritance was confirmed to him by your father, brave King William, my Lord; but now he is dead, and his kinsman, Roger de Maisonforte, hath ousted her and me, her son and lawful heir, from house and home, and we pray for justice, Sir King?'


'Ha, Roger, thou there! What say'st thou to this bold beggar!' shouted the Red King.

'I say,' returned a black, bronzed hunter, pressing to the front, 'that what I hold of thee, King William, on tenure of homage, and of two good horses and staunch hounds yearly, I yield to no English mongrel churl, who dares to meddle with me.'

'Thou hear'st, lad,' said Rufus, with his accustomed oath, 'homage hath been done to us for the land, nor may it be taken back. Out of our way, or——'

'Sir! sir!' entreated the lad, grasping the bridle, 'if no more might be, we would be content if Sir Roger would but leave my mother enough for her maintenance among the nuns of Romsey, and give me a horse and suit of mail to go on the Holy War with Duke Robert.'

'Ho! ho! a modest request for a beggarly Eng-



lish clown!' cried the King, aiming a blow at the lad with his whip, and pushing on his horse, so as almost to throw him back on the heath. 'Ho! ho! fit him out for a fool's errand!'

'We'll fit him! We'll teach him to take the cross at other men's expense!' shouted the followers, seizing on the boy.

'Nay; we'll bestow his cross on him for a free gift!' exclaimed Roger de Maisonforte.

And Bertram, struggling desperately in vain among the band of ruffians, found his left arm bared, and two long and painful slashes, in the form of the Crusader's cross, inflicted, amid loud laughter, as the blood sprang forth.

'There, Sir Crusader,' said Roger, grinding his teeth over him. 'Go on thy way now—as a horse-boy, if so please thee, and know better than to throw thy mean false English pretension in the face of a gentle Norman.'

Men, horses, dogs, all seemed to trample and scoff at Bertram as he fell back on the elastic stems of the heath and gorse, whose prickles seemed to renew the insults by scratching his face. When the King's horn, the calls, the brutal laughter, and the baying of the dogs had begun to die away in the distance, he

gathered himself together, sat up, and tried to find some means of stanching the blood. Not only was the wound in a place hard to reach, but it had been ploughed with the point of a boar-spear, and was grievously torn. He could do nothing with it, and, as he perceived, he had further been robbed of his sword, his last possession, his father's sword.

The large tears of mingled rage, grief, and pain might well spring from the poor boy's eyes in his utter loneliness, as he clenched his hand with powerless wrath, and regained his feet, to retrace, as best he might, his way to where his widowed mother had found a temporary shelter in a small religious house.

The sun grew hotter and hotter, Bertram's wound bled, though not profusely, the smart grew upon him, his tongue was parched with thirst, and though he kept resolutely on, his breath came panting, his head grew dizzy, his eyes dim, his feet faltered, and at last, just as he attained a wider and more trodden way, he dropped insensible by the side of the path, his dry lips trying to utter the cry, 'Lord, have mercy on me!'

II

DE JURE

When Bertram de Maisonforte opened his eyes again cold waters were on his face, wine was moistening his lips, the burning of his wound was assuaged by cooling oil, while a bandage was being applied, and he was supported on a breast and in arms, clad indeed in a hauberk, but as tenderly kind as the full deep voice that spoke in English, 'He comes round. How now, my child?'

'Father,' murmured Bertram, with dreamy senses.

'Better now; another sup from the flask, David,' again said the kind voice, and looking up, he became aware of the beautiful benignant face, deep blue eyes, and long light locks of the man in early middle age who had laid him on his knee, while a priest was binding his arm, and a fair and graceful boy, a little younger than himself, was standing by with the flask of wine in his hand, and a face of such girlish beauty that as he knelt to hold the wine to his lips, Bertram asked—

'Am I among the Angels?'

‘Not yet,’ said the elder man. ‘Art thou near thine home?’

‘Alack! I have no home, kind sir,’ said Bertram, now able to raise himself and to perceive that he was in the midst of a small band of armed men, such as every knight or noble necessarily carried about with him for protection. There was a standard with a dragon, and their leader himself was armed, all save his head, and, as Bertram saw, was a man of massive strength, noble stature, and kingly appearance.

‘What shall we do for thee?’ he asked. ‘Who hath put thee in this evil case?’

Bertram gave his name, and at its Norman sound there was a start of repulsion from the boy. ‘French after all!’ he exclaimed.

‘Nay, David,’ said the leader, ‘if I mind me rightly, the Lady Elftrud of Boyatt wedded a brave Norman of that name. Art thou her son? I see something of her face, and thou hast an English tongue.’

‘I am; I am her only son!’ exclaimed Bertram; and as he told of his wrongs and the usage he had met with, young David cried out with indignation—

‘Uncle, uncle, how canst thou suffer that these

things should be? Here are our faithful cnihts. Let us ride to the forest. Wherefore should it not be with Red William and his ruffians as with Scottish Duncan and Donald?’

‘Hush thee, David, my nephew. Thou knowest that may not be. But for thee, young Bertram, we will see what can be done. Canst sit a horse now?’

‘Yea, my lord, full well. I know not what came over me, even now,’ said Bertram, much ashamed of the condition in which he had been found.

A sumpter horse was found for him, the leader of the party saying that they would go on to his own home, where the youth’s wound should be looked to, and they could then decide what could be done for him.


Bertram was still so far faint, suffering, weak, and weary, that he was hardly awake to curiosity as to his surroundings, and had quite enough to do to keep his seat in the saddle, and follow in the wake of the leader’s tall white horse, above which shone his bright chain mail and his still brighter golden locks, so that the exhausted boy began in some measure to feel as if he were following St. Michael on his way to some better world.

Now and then the tall figure turned to see how it

was with him, and as he drooped more with fatigue and pain, bade one of the retainers keep beside him and support him.

Thus at length the cavalcade left the heathery expanse and reached a valley, green with meadowland and waving corn, with silvery beards of barley rippling in the evening light, and cows and sheep being gathered for the night towards a dwelling where the river had been trained to form a moat round low green ramparts enclosing a number of one-storied thatched houses and barns, with one round tower, a strong embattled gateway, and at a little distance a square church tower, and other cottages standing outside.

A shout of ecstasy broke out from the village as the advancing party was seen and recognised. Men, women, and children, rudely but substantially clad, and many wearing the collar of the thrall, ran out from their houses, baring their heads, bowing low, and each in turn receiving some kind word or nod of greeting from the lord whom they welcomed, while one after another of his armed followers turned aside, and was absorbed into a happy family by wife or parent. A drawbridge crossed the moat, and there was a throng of joyful servants in the archway



—foremost a priest, stretching out his hands in blessing, and a foreign-looking old woman, gray-haired and dark-eyed, who gathered young David into her embrace as he sprang from his horse, calling him her heart's darling and her sunshine, and demanding, with a certain alarm, where were his brothers.

'In Scotland, dear Nurse Agnes—even where they should be,' was David's answer. 'We are conquerors, do you see! Edgar is a crowned and anointed King—seated on the holy stone of Scone, and Alexander is beside him to fight for him!'

'It is even so, nurse,' said the elder man, turning from the priest, to whom he had more briefly spoken; 'God hath blessed our arms, and young Edgar has his right. God shield him in it! And now, nurse, here is a poor youth who needs thy care, after one of Red William's rough jests.'

III

KING AT HOME


Weary, faint, and feverish as Bertram de Maisonforte was, he was past caring for anything but the relief of rest, cool drink, and the dressing of his

wound ; nor did he even ask where he was until he awoke in broad daylight the next morning, to the sound of church bells, to the sight of a low but spacious chamber, with stone walls, deerskins laid on the floor, and the old nurse standing by him with a cup of refreshing drink, and ready to attend to his wound.

It was then that, feeling greatly refreshed, he ventured upon asking her in whose house he was, and who was the good lord who had taken pity on him.

‘Who should it be save him who should be the good lord of every Englishman,’ she replied, ‘mine own dear foster-son, the princely Atheling—he who takes up the cause of every injured man save his own?’

Bertram was amazed, for he had only heard Normans speak of Edgar Atheling, the heir of the ancient race, as a poor, tame-spirited, wretched creature, unable to assert himself, and therefore left unmolested by the conquerors out of contempt. He proceeded to ask what the journey was from which the Atheling was returning, and the nurse, nothing loth, beguiled the tendance on his arm by explaining how she had long ago travelled from Hungary with her charges,




Edgar, Margaret, and Christina ; how it had come about that the crown, which should have been her darling's, had been seized by the fierce duke from beyond the sea ; how Edgar, then a mere child, had been forced to swear oaths of fealty by which he held himself still bound ; how her sweetest pearl of ladies, her jewel Margaret, had been wedded to the rude wild King of Scots, and how her gentle sweetness and holiness had tamed and softened him, so that she had been the blessing of his kingdom till he and his eldest son had fallen at Alnwick while she lay a-dying ; how the fierce savage Scots had risen and driven forth her young children ; and how their uncle the Atheling had ridden forth, taken them to his home, bred them in all holiness and uprightness and good and knightly courage, and when Edgar and Alexander, the two eldest, were full grown, had gone northward with them once more, and had won back, in fair field, the throne of their father Malcolm.

Truly there might well be rejoicing and triumph on the estate where the Atheling ruled as a father and had been sorely missed. He was at his early mass of thanksgiving at present, and Bertram was so much better that Nurse Agnes did not withstand his desire to rise and join the household and villagers,

who were all collected in the building, low and massive, but on which Edgar Atheling had lavished the rich ornamental work introduced by the Normans. The round arched doorway was set in a succession of elaborate zigzags, birds' heads, lions' faces, twists and knots ; and within, the altar-hangings and the priest's robes were stiff with the exquisite and elaborate embroidery for which the English nunneries were famed.

The whole building, with its low-browed roof, circular chancel arch still more richly adorned, and stout short columns, was filled with kneeling figures in rough homespun or sheepskin garments, and with shaggy heads, above which towered the shining golden locks of the Atheling, which were allowed to grow to a much greater length than was the Norman fashion, and beside him was the still fairer head of his young nephew, David of Scotland. It was a thanksgiving service for their victory and safe return ; and Bertram was just in time for the *Te Deum* that followed the mass.

The Atheling, after all was over, came forth, exchanging greetings with one after another of his franklins, cnihts, and thralls, all of whom seemed to be equally delighted to see him back again, and whom he bade to a feast in the hall, which would



be prepared in the course of the day. Some, meantime, went to their homes near at hand, others would amuse themselves with games at ball, archery, single-stick, and the like, in an open space within the moat—where others fished.

Bertram was not neglected. The Atheling inquired after his health, heard his story in more detail, and after musing on it, said that after setting affairs in order at home, he meant to visit his sister and niece in the Abbey at Romsey, and would then make some arrangement for the Lady of Maisonforte; also he would endeavour to see the King on his return to Winchester, and endeavour to plead with him.

‘William will at times hearken to an old comrade,’ he said; ‘but it is an ill time to take him when he is hot upon the chase. Meantime, thou art scarce yet fit to ride, and needest more of good Agnes’s leechcraft.’

Bertram was indeed stiff and weary enough to be quite content to lie on a bearskin in the wide hall of the dwelling, or under the eaves without, and watch the doings with some amusement.

He had been bred in some contempt of the Saxons. His father’s marriage had been viewed as a *mésalliance*, and though the knight of Maisonforte had been

honourable and kindly, and the Lady Elfrud had fared better than many a Saxon bride, still the French and the Breton dames of the neighbourhood had looked down on her, and the retainers had taught her son to look on the English race as swine, boors, and churls, ignorant of all gentle arts, of skill and grace.

But here was young David among youths of his own age, tilting as gracefully and well as any young Norman could—making Bertram long that his arm should cease to be so heavy and burning, so that he might show his prowess.

Here was a contention with bow and arrow that would not have disgraced the best men-at-arms of Maisonforte—here again, later in the day, was minstrelsy of a higher order than his father's ears had cared for, but of which his mother had whispered her traditions.

Here, again, was the chaplain showing his brother-priests with the greatest pride and delight a scroll of Latin, copied from a MS. Psalter of the holy and Venerable Beda by the hand of his own dear pupil, young David.

Bertram, who could neither read nor write, and knew no more Latin than his Paternoster, Credo,



and Ave, absolutely did not believe his eyes and ears till he had asked the question, whether this were indeed the youth's work. How could it be possible to wield pen as well as lance?

But the wonder of all was the Atheling. After an absence of more than a year, there was much to be adjusted, and his authority on his own lands was thoroughly judicial even for life or death, since even under Norman sway he held the power of an earl.

Seated in a high-backed, cross-legged chair—his majestic form commanding honour and respect—he heard one after another causes that came before him, reserved for his judgment, questions of heirship, disputes about cattle, complaints of thievery, encroachments on land; and Bertram, listening with the interest that judgment never fails to excite, was deeply impressed with the clear-headedness, the ready thought, and the justice of the decision, even when the dispute lay between Saxon and Norman, always with reference to the laws of Alfred and Edward which he seemed to carry in his head.

Indeed, ere long, two Norman knights, hearing of the Atheling's return, came to congratulate him, and lay before him a dispute of boundaries which they declared they would rather entrust to him than to

any other. And they treated him far more as a prince than as a Saxon churl.

They willingly accepted his invitation to go in to the feast of welcome, and a noble one it was, with music and minstrelsy, hospitality to all around, plenty and joy, wassail bowls going round, and the Atheling presiding over it, and with a strange and quiet influence, breaking up the entertainment in all good will, by the memory of his sweet sister Margaret's grace-cup, ere mirth had become madness, or the English could incur their reproach of coarse revelry.

'And,' as the Norman knight who had prevailed said to Bertram, 'Sir Edgar the Atheling had thus shown himself truly an uncrowned King.'

IV

WHO SHALL BE KING?

The noble cloisters of Romsey, with the grand church rising in their midst, had a lodging-place, strictly cut off from the nunnery, for male visitors.

Into this Edgar Atheling rode with his armed train, and as they entered, some strange expression in the faces of the porters and guards met them.

‘Had my lord heard the news?’ demanded a priest, who hastened forward, bowing low.

‘No, Holy Father. No ill of my sister?’ anxiously inquired the Prince.

‘The Mother Abbess is well, my Lord Atheling ; but the King—William the Red—is gone to his account. He was found two eves ago pierced to the heart with an arrow beneath an oak in Malwood Chace.’

God have mercy on his poor soul!’ ejaculated Edgar, crossing himself. ‘No moment vouchsafed for penitence! Alas! Who did the deed, Father Dunstan?’

‘That is not known,’ returned the priest, ‘save that Walter Tyrrel is fled like a hunted felon beyond seas, and my Lord Henry to Winchester.’

Young David pressed up to his uncle’s side.

‘Sir, sir,’ he said, ‘what a time is this! Duke Robert absent, none know where ; our men used to war, all ready to gather round you. This rule will be ended, the old race restored. Say but the word, and I will ride back and raise our franklins as one man. Thou wilt, too, Bertram!’

‘With all mine heart!’ cried Bertram. ‘Let me be the first to do mine homage.’

And as Edgar Atheling stood in the outer court, with lofty head and noble thoughtful face, pure-complexioned and high-browed, each who beheld him felt that there stood a king of men. A shout of 'King Edgar! Edgar, King of England,' echoed through the buildings; and priests, men-at-arms, and peasants began to press forward to do him homage. But he raised his hand—

'Hold, children,' he said. 'I thank you all; but much must come ere ye imperil yourselves by making oaths to me that ye might soon have to break! Let me pass on and see my sister.'

Abbeys were not strictly cloistered then, and the Abbess Christina was at the door, a tall woman, older than her brother, and somewhat hard-featured, and beside her was a lovely fair girl, with peach-like cheeks and bright blue eyes, who threw herself into David's arms, full of delight.

'Brother,' said Christina, 'did I hear aright? And have they hailed thee King? Are the years of cruel wrong ended at last? Victor for others, wilt thou be victor for thyself?'

'What is consistent with God's will, and with mine oaths, that I hope to do,' was Edgar's reply.

But even as he stood beside the Abbess in the



porch, without having yet entered, there was a clattering and trampling of horse, and through the gate came hastily a young man in a hauberk, with a ring of gold about his helmet, holding out his hands as he saw the Atheling.

‘Sire Edgar,’ he said, ‘I knew not I should find you here, when I came to pay my first *devoirs* as a King to the Lady Mother Abbess’ (he kissed her unwilling hand) ‘and the Lady Edith.’

Edith turned away a blushing face, and the Abbess faltered—

‘As a King?’

‘Yea, lady. As such have I been owned by all at Winchester. I should be at Westminster for my Coronation, save that I turned from my course to win her who shall share my crown.’

‘Is it even thus, Henry?’ said Edgar. ‘Hast not thought of other rights?’

‘Of that crazed fellow Robert’s?’ demanded Henry. ‘Trouble not thine head for him! Even if he came back living from this Holy War in the East, my father had too much mercy on England to leave it to the like of him.’

‘There be other and older rights, Sir Henry,’ said the Abbess.

Henry looked up for a moment in some consternation. 'Ho! Sir Edgar, thou hast been so long a peaceful man that I had forgotten. Thou knowest thy day went by with Hereward le Wake. See, fair Edith and I know one another—she shall be my Queen.'

'Veiled and vowed,' began the Abbess.

'Oh, not yet! Tell her not yet!' whispered Edith in David's ear.

'Thou little traitress! Wed thy house's foe, who takes thine uncle's place? Nay! I will none of thee,' said David, shaking her off roughly; but her uncle threw his arm round her kindly.

At that moment a Norman knight spurred up to Henry with some communication that made him look uneasy, and Christina, laying her hand on Edgar's arm, said: 'Brother, we have vaults. Thy troop outnumbered his. The people of good old Wessex are with thee! Now is thy time! Save thy country. Restore the line and laws of Alfred and Edward.'

'Thou know'st not what thou wouldst have, Christina,' said Edgar. 'One sea of blood wherever a Norman castle rises! I love my people too well to lead them to a fruitless struggle with all the might of Normandy unless I saw better hope than lies

before me now! Mind thee, I swore to Duke William that I would withstand neither him nor any son of his whom the English duly hailed. Yet, I will see how it is with this young man,' he added, as she fell back muttering, 'Craven! Who ever won throne without blood?'

Henry had an anxious face when he turned from his knight, who, no doubt, had told him how completely he was in the Atheling's power.

'Sir Edgar,' he said, 'a word with you. Winchester is not far off—nor Porchester—nor my brother William's Free companies, and his treasure. Normans will scarce see Duke William's son tampered with, nor bow their heads to the English!'

'Belike, Henry of Normandy,' said Edgar, rising above him in his grave majesty. 'Yet have I a question or two to put to thee. Thou art a graver, more scholarly man than thy brother, less like to be led away by furies. Have the people of England and Normandy sworn to thee willingly as their King?'

'Even so, in the Minster,' Henry began, and would have said more, but Edgar again made his gesture of authority.

'Wilt thou grant them the charter of Alfred and Edward, with copies spread throughout the land?'

‘I will.’

‘Wilt thou do equal justice between English and Norman?’

‘To the best of my power.’

‘Wilt thou bring home the Archbishop, fill up the dioceses, do thy part by the Church?’

‘So help me God, I will.’

‘Then, Henry of Normandy, I, Edgar Atheling, kiss thine hand, and become thy man; and may God deal with thee, as thou dost with England.’

The noble form of Edgar bent before the slighter younger figure of Henry, who burst into tears, genuine at the moment, and vowed most earnestly to be a good King to the entire people. No doubt, he meant it—then.

And now—far more humbly, he made his suit to the Atheling for the hand of his niece.

Edgar took her apart. ‘Edith, canst thou brook this man?’

‘Uncle, he was good to me when we were children together at the old King’s Court. I have made no vows, I tore the veil mine aunt threw over me from mine head. Methinks with me beside him he would never be hard to our people.’

‘So be it then, Edith. If he holds to this purpose

when he hath been crowned at Westminster, he shall have thee, though I fear thou hast chosen a hard lot, and wilt rue the day when thou didst quit these peaceful walls.'

And one more stipulation was made by Edgar the Atheling, ere he rode to own Henry as King in the face of the English people at Westminster—namely, that Boyatt should be restored to the true heiress the Lady Elftrud. And to Roger, compensation was secretly made at the Atheling's expense, ere departing with Bertram in his train for the Holy War. For Bertram could not look at the scar without feeling himself a Crusader; and Edgar judged it better for England to remove himself for awhile, while he laid all earthly aspirations at the Feet of the King of kings.

The little English troop arrived just in time to share in the capture of the Holy City, to join in the eager procession of conquerors to the Holy Sepulchre, and to hear Godfrey de Bouillon elected to defend the sacred possession, refusing to wear a crown where the King of Saints and Lord of Heaven and Earth had worn a Crown of Thorns.

SIGBERT'S GUERDON

A FEUDAL castle, of massive stone, with donjon keep and high crenellated wall, gateway tower, moat and drawbridge, was a strange, incongruous sight in one of the purple-red stony slopes of Palestine, with Hermon's snowy peak rising high above. It was accounted for, however, by the golden crosses of the kingdom of Jerusalem waving above the watch-tower, that rose like a pointing finger above the keep, in company with a lesser ensign bearing a couchant hound, sable.


It was a narrow rocky pass that the Castle of Gebel-Aroun guarded, overlooking a winding ravine between the spurs of the hills, descending into the fertile plain of Esdraelon from the heights of Galilee Hills, noted in many an Israelite battle, and now held by the Crusaders.

Bare, hard, and rocky were the hills around—the slopes and the valley itself, which in the earlier

season had been filled with rich grass, Calvary clover, blood-red anemones, and pale yellow amaryllis, only showed their arid brown or gray remnants. The moat had become a deep waterless cleft; and beneath, on the accessible sides towards the glen, clustered a collection of black horsehair tents, the foremost surmounted by the ill-omened crescent.

The burning sun had driven every creature under shelter, and no one was visible; but well was it known that watch and ward was closely kept from beneath those dark tents, that to the eyes within had the air of couching beasts of prey. Yes, couching to devour what could not fail to be theirs, in spite of the mighty walls of rock and impregnable keep, for those deadly and insidious foes, hunger and thirst, were within, gaining the battle for the Saracens without, who had merely to wait in patience for the result.

Some years previously, Sir William de Hundberg, a Norman knight, had been expelled from his English castle by the partisans of Stephen, and with wife and children had followed Count Fulk of Anjou to his kingdom of Palestine, and had been endowed by him with one of the fortresses which guarded the passes of Galilee, under that exaggeration of the



feudal system which prevailed in the crusading kingdom of Jerusalem.

Climate speedily did its work with the lady, warfare with two of her sons, and there only remained of the family a youth of seventeen, Walter, and his sister Mabel, fourteen, who was already betrothed to the young Baron of Courtwood, then about to return to England. The treaty with Stephen and the success of young Henry of Anjou gave Sir William hopes of restitution ; but just as he was about to conduct her to Jerusalem for the wedding, before going back to England, he fell sick of one of the recurring fevers of the country ; and almost at the same time the castle was beleaguered by a troop of Arabs, under the command of a much-dreaded Sheik.

His constitution was already much shaken, and Sir William, after a few days of alternate torpor and delirium, passed away, without having been conscious enough to leave any counsel to his children, or any directions to Father Philip, the chaplain, or Sigbert, his English squire.

At the moment, sorrow was not disturbed by any great alarm, for the castle was well victualled, and had a good well, supplied by springs from the mountains ; and Father Philip, after performing the


funeral rites for his lord, undertook to make his way to Tiberias, or to Jerusalem, with tidings of their need; and it was fully anticipated that succour would arrive long before the stores in the castle had been exhausted.

But time went on, and, though food was not absolutely lacking, the spring of water which had hitherto supplied the garrison began to fail. Whether through summer heats, or whether the wily enemy had succeeded in cutting off the source, where once there had been a clear crystal pool in the rock, cold as the snow from which it came, there only dribbled a few scanty drops, caught with difficulty, and only imbibed from utter necessity, so great was the suspicion of their being poisoned by the enemy.

The wine was entirely gone, and the salted provision, which alone remained, made the misery of thirst almost unbearable.

On the cushions, richly embroidered in dainty Eastern colouring, lay Mabel de Hundberg, with dry lips half opened and panting, too weary to move, yet listening all intent.

Another moment, and in chamois leather coat, his helmet in hand, entered her brother from the



turret stair, and threw himself down hopelessly, answering her gesture.

‘No, no, of course no. The dust was only from another swarm of those hateful Saracens. I knew it would be so. Pah! it has made my tongue more like old boot leather than ever. Have no more drops been squeezed from the well? It’s time the cup was filled!’

‘It was Roger’s turn. Sigbert said he should have the next,’ said Mabel.

Walter uttered an imprecation upon Roger, and a still stronger one on Sigbert’s meddling. But instantly the cry was, ‘Where is Sigbert?’

Walter even took the trouble to shout up and down the stair for Sigbert, and to demand hotly of the weary, dejected men-at-arms where Sigbert was; but no one could tell.

‘Gone over to the enemy, the old traitor,’ said Walter, again dropping on the divan.

‘Never! Sigbert is no traitor,’ returned his sister.

‘He is an English churl, and all churls are traitors,’ responded Walter.

The old nurse, who was fitfully fanning Mabel with a dried palm-leaf, made a growl of utter dissent, and Mabel exclaimed, ‘None was ever so faithful as good old Sigbert.’

It was a promising quarrel, but their lips were too dry to keep it up for more than a snarl or two. Walter cast himself down, and bade old Tata fan him; why should Mabel have it all to herself?

Then sounds of wrangling were heard below, and Walter roused himself to go down and interfere. The men were disputing over some miserable dregs of wine at the bottom of a skin. Walter shouted to call them to order, but they paid little heed.

'Do not meddle and make, young sir,' said a low-browed, swarthy fellow. 'There's plenty of cool drink of the right sort out there.'

'Traitor!' cried Walter; 'better die than yield.'

'If one have no mind for dying like an old crab in a rock,' said the man.

'They would think nought of making an end of us out there,' said another.

'I'd as lief be choked at once by a cord as by thirst,' was the answer.

'That you are like to be, if you talk such treason,' threatened Walter. 'Seize him, Richard—Martin.'

Richard and Martin, however, hung back, one muttering that Gil had done nothing, and the other that he might be in the right of it; and when Walter burst out in angry threats he was answered in a

gruff voice that he had better take care what he said, 'There was no standing not only wasting with thirst and hunger, but besides being blustered at by a hot-headed lad, that scarce knew a hauberk from a helmet.'

Walter, in his rage, threw himself with drawn sword on the mutineer, but was seized and dragged back by half a dozen stalwart arms, such as he had no power to resist, and he was held fast amid rude laughs and brutal questions whether he should thus be carried to the Saracens, and his sister with him.

'The old Sheik would give a round sum for a fair young damsel like her!' were the words that maddened her brother into a desperate struggle, baffled with a hoarse laugh by the men-at-arms, who were keeping him down, hand and foot, when a new voice sounded: 'How now, fellows! What's this?'

In one moment Walter was released and on his feet, and the men fell back, ashamed and gloomy, as a sturdy figure, with sun-browned face, light locks worn away by the helmet, and slightly grizzled, stood among them, in a much-rubbed and soiled chamois leather garment.

Walter broke out into passionate exclamations; the men, evidently ashamed, met them with mur-

murs and growls. 'Bad enough, bad enough!' broke in Sigbert; 'but there's no need to make it worse. Better to waste with hunger and thirst than be a nidering fellow—rising against your lord in his distress.'

'We would never have done it if he would have kept a civil tongue.'

'Civility's hard to a tongue dried up,' returned Sigbert. 'But look you here, comrades, leave me a word with my young lord here, and I plight my faith that you shall have enow to quench your thirst within six hours at the least.'

There was an attempt at a cheer, broken by the murmur, 'We have heard enough of that! It is always six hours and six hours.'

'And the Saracen hounds outside would at least give us a draught of water ere they made away with us,' said another.

'Saracens, forsooth!' said Sigbert. 'You shall leave the Saracens far behind you. A few words first with my lord, and you shall hear. Meanwhile, you, John Cook, take all the beef remaining; make it in small fardels, such as a man may easily carry.'

'That's soon done,' muttered the cook. 'The entire weight would scarce bow a lad's shoulders.'

'The rest of you put together what you would save from the enemy, and is not too heavy to carry.'

One man made some attempt at growling at a mere lad being consulted, while the stout warriors were kept in ignorance; but the spirit of discipline and confidence had returned with Sigbert, and no one heeded the murmur. Meantime, Sigbert followed the young Lord Walter up the rough winding stairs to the chamber where Mabel lay on her cushions. 'What! what!' demanded the boy, pausing to enter.

Sigbert, by way of answer, quietly produced from some hidden pouch two figs. Walter snatched at one with a cry of joy. Mabel held out her hand, then, with a gasp, drew it back. 'Has Roger had one?'

Sigbert signed in the affirmative, and Mabel took a bite of the luscious fruit with a gasp of pleasure, yet paused once more to hold the remainder to her nurse.

'The Saints bless you, my sweet lamb!' exclaimed the old woman; 'finish it yourself. I could not.'

'If you don't want it, give it to me,' put in Walter.

'For shame, my lord,' Sigbert did not scruple to say, nor could the thirsty girl help finishing the refreshing morsel, while Walter, with some scanty

murmur of excuse, demanded where it came from, and what Sigbert had meant by promises of safety.

'Sir,' said Sigbert, 'you may remember how some time back your honoured father threw one of the fellaheen into the dungeon for maiming old Leo.'

'The villain! I remember. I thought he was hanged.'

'No, sir. He escaped. I went to take him food, and he was gone! I then found an opening in the vault, of which I spoke to none, save your father, for fear of mischief; but I built it up with stones. Now, in our extremity, I bethought me of it, and resolved to try whether the prisoner had truly escaped, for where he went, we might go. Long and darksome is the way underground, but it opens at last through one of the old burial-places of the Jews into the thickets upon the bank of the Jordan.'

'The Jordan! Little short of a league!' exclaimed Walter.

'A league, underground, and in the dark,' sighed Mabel.

'Better than starving here like a rat in a trap,' returned her brother.

'Ah yes; oh yes! I will think of the cool river and the trees at the end.'

‘You will find chill enough, lady, long ere you reach the river,’ said Sigbert. ‘You must wrap yourself well. ’Tis an ugly passage; but your heart must not fail you, for it is the only hope left us.’

The two young people were far too glad to hear of any prospect of release, to think much of the dangers or discomforts of the mode. Walter danced for joy up and down the room like a young colt, as he thought of being in a few hours more in the free open air, with the sound of water rippling below, and the shade of trees above him. Mabel threw herself on her knees before her rude crucifix, partly in thankfulness, partly in dread of the passage that was to come first.

‘Like going through the grave to life,’ she murmured to her nurse.

And when the scanty garrison was gathered together, as many as possible provided with brands that might serve as torches, and Sigbert led them, lower and lower, down rugged steps hewn in the rock, through vaults where only a gleam came from above, and then through deeper cavernous places, intensely dark, there was a shudder perceptible by the clank and rattle of the armour which each had donned. In the midst, Walter paused and exclaimed—

'Our banner! How leave it to the Paynim dogs?'

'It's here, sir,' said Sigbert, showing a bundle on his back.

'Warning to the foe to break in and seek us,' grumbled Gilbert.

'Not so,' replied Sigbert. 'I borrowed an old wrapper of nurse's that will cheat their eyes till we shall be far beyond their ken.'

In the last dungeon a black opening lay before them, just seen by the light of the lamp Sigbert carried, but so low that there was no entrance save on hands and knees.

'That den!' exclaimed Walter. 'Tis a rat-hole. Never can we go that way.'

'I have tried it, sir,' quoth Sigbert. 'Where I can go, you can go. Your sister quails not.'

'It is fearful,' said Mabel, unable to repress a shiver; 'but, Walter, think what is before us if we stay here! The Saints will guard us.'

'The worst and lowest part only lasts for a few rods,' explained Sigbert. 'Now, sir, give your orders. Torches and lanterns, save Hubert's and nurse's, to be extinguished. We cannot waste them too soon, but beware of loosing hold on them.'

Walter repeated the orders thus dictated to him, and Sigbert arranged the file. It was absolutely needful that Sigbert should go first to lead the way. Mabel was to follow him for the sake of his help, then her brother, next nurse, happily the only other female. Between two stout and trustworthy men the wounded Roger came. Then one after another the rest of the men-at-arms and servants, five-and-twenty in number. The last of the file was Hubert, with a lamp; the others had to move in darkness. There had been no horse of any value in the castle, for the knight's charger had been mortally hurt in his last expedition, and there had been no opportunity of procuring another. A deerhound, however, pushed and scrambled to the front, and Sigbert observed that he might be of great use in running before them. Before entering, however, Sigbert gave the caution that no word nor cry must be uttered aloud, hap what might, until permission was given, for they would pass under the Saracen camp, and there was no knowing whether the sounds would reach the ears above ground.

A strange plunge it was into the utter darkness, crawling on hands and knees, with the chill cavernous gloom and rock seeming to press in upon those

who slowly crept along, the dim light of Sigbert's lamp barely showing as he slowly moved on before. One of the two in the rear was dropped and extinguished in the dismal passage, a loss proclaimed by a suppressed groan passing along the line, and a louder exclamation from Walter, causing Sigbert to utter a sharp 'Hush!' enforced by a thud and tramp above, as if the rock were coming down on them, but which probably was the trampling of horses in the camp above.

The smoke of the lamp in front drifted back, and the air was more and more oppressive. Mabel, with set teeth and compressed lips, struggled on, clinging tight to the end of the cord which Sigbert had tied to his body for her to hold by, while in like manner Walter's hand was upon her dress. It became more and more difficult to breathe, or crawl on, till at last, just as there was a sense that it was unbearable, and that it would be easier to lie still and die than be dragged an inch farther, the air became freer, the roof seemed to be farther away, the cavern wider, and the motion freer.

Sigbert helped his young lady to stand upright, and one by one all the train regained their feet. The lamp was passed along to be rekindled, speech was

permitted, crevices above sometimes admitted air, sometimes dripped with water. The worst was over—probably the first part had been excavated, the farther portion was one of the many natural ‘dens and caves of the earth,’ in which Palestine abounds. There was still a considerable distance to be traversed, the lamps burnt out, and had to be succeeded by torches carefully husbanded, for the way was rough and rocky, and a stumble might end in a fall into an abyss. In time, however, openings of side galleries were seen, niches in the wall, and tokens that the outer portion of the cavern had been once a burial-place of the ancient Israelites—‘the dog Jews,’ as the Crusaders called them, with a shudder of loathing and contempt.

And joy infinite—clear daylight and a waving tree were perceptible beyond. It was daylight, was it? but the sun was low. Five hours at least had been spent in that dismal transit, before the exhausted, soiled, and chilled company stepped forth into a green thicket with the Jordan rushing far below. Five weeks’ siege in a narrow fortress, then the two miles of subterranean struggle—these might well make the grass beneath the wild sycamore, the cork-tree, the long reeds, the willows, above all, the sound of the flowing

water, absolute ecstasy. There was an instant rush for the river, impeded by many a thorn-bush and creeper; but almost anything green was welcome at the moment, and the only disappointment was at the height and steepness of the banks of rock. However, at last one happy man found a place where it was possible to climb down to the shingly bed of the river, close to a great mass of the branching headed papyrus reed. Into the muddy but eminently sweet water most of them waded; helmets became cups, hands scooped up the water, there were gasps of joy and refreshment and blessing on the cool wave so long needed.

Sigbert and Walter between them helped down Mabel and her nurse, and found a secure spot for them, where weary faces, feet, and hands might be laved in the pool beneath a rock.

Then, taking up a bow and arrows laid down by one of the men, Sigbert applied himself to the endeavour to shoot some of the water-fowl which were flying wildly about over the reeds in the unwonted disturbance caused by the bathers. He brought down two or three of the duck kind, and another of the party had bethought him of angling with a string and one of the only too numerous

insects, and had caught sundry of the unsuspecting and excellent fish. He had also carefully preserved a little fire, and, setting his boy to collect fuel, he produced embers enough to cook both fish and birds sufficiently to form an appetising meal for those who had been reduced to scraps of salt food for full a fortnight.

‘All is well so far,’ said Walter, with his little lordly air. ‘We have arranged our retreat with great skill. The only regret is that I have been forced to leave the castle to the enemy! the castle we were bound to defend.’

‘Nay, sir, if it be your will,’ said Sigbert, ‘the tables might yet be turned on the Saracen.’

With great eagerness Walter asked how this could be, and Sigbert reminded him that many a time it had been observed from the tower that, though the Saracens kept careful watch on the gates of the besieged so as to prevent a sally, they left the rear of their camp absolutely undefended, after the ordinary Eastern fashion, and Sigbert, with some dim recollection of rhymed chronicles of Gideon and of Jonathan, believed that these enemies might be surprised after the same fashion as theirs. Walter leapt up for joy, but Sigbert had to remind him that the sun was

scarcely set, and that time must be given for the Saracens to fall asleep before the attack ; besides that his own men needed repose.

‘ There is all the distance to be traversed,’ said Walter.

‘ Barely a league, sir.’

It was hard to believe that the space, so endless underground, was so short above, and Walter was utterly incredulous, till, climbing the side of the ravine so high as to be above the trees, Sigbert showed him the familiar landmarks known in hunting excursions with his father. He was all eagerness ; but Sigbert insisted on waiting till past midnight before moving, that the men might have time to regain their vigour by sleep, and also that there might be time for the Saracens to fall into the deepest of all slumbers in full security.

The moon was low in the West when Sigbert roused the party, having calculated that it would light them on the way, but would be set by the time the attack was to be made.

For Mabel’s security it was arranged that a small and most unwilling guard should remain with her, near enough to be able to perceive how matters went ; and if there appeared to be defeat and danger for her

brother, there would probably be full time to reach Tiberias even on foot.

However, the men of the party had little fear that flight would be needed, for, though perhaps no one would have thought of the scheme for himself, there was a general sense that what Sigbert devised was prudent, and that he would not imperil his young lord and lady upon a desperate venture.

Keeping well and compactly together, the little band moved on, along arid, rocky paths, starting now and then at the howls of the jackals which gradually gathered into a pack, and began to follow, as if—some one whispered—they scented prey, ‘On whom?’ was the question.

On a cliff looking down on the Arab camp, and above it on the dark mass of the castle, where, in the watch-tower, Sigbert had left a lamp burning, they halted just as the half-moon was dipping below the heights towards the Mediterranean. Here the Lady Mabel and her guard were to wait until they heard the sounds which to their practised ears would show how the fight went.

The Arab shout of victory they knew only too well, and it was to be the signal of flight towards Tiberias ; but if success was with the assailants, the

war-cry 'Deus vult,' and 'St. Hubert for Hundberg,' were to be followed by the hymn of victory as the token that it was safe to descend.

All was dark, save for the magnificent stars of an Eastern night, as Mabel, her nurse, and the five men, commanded by the wounded Roger, stood silently praying while listening intently to the muffled tramp of their own people, descending on the blacker mass denoting the Saracen tents.

The sounds of feet died away, only the jackal's whine and moan were heard. Then suddenly came a flash of lights in different directions, and shouts here, there, everywhere, cries, yells, darkness, an undistinguishable medley of noise, the shrill shriek of the Moslem, and the exulting war-cry of the Christian ringing farther and farther off, in the long valley leading towards the Jordan fords.

Dawn began to break—overthrown tents could be seen. Mabel had time to wonder whether she was forgotten, when the hymn began to sound, pealing on her ears up the pass, and she had not had time for more than an earnest thanksgiving, and a few steps down the rocky pathway, before a horse's tread was heard, and a man-at-arms came towards her leading a slender, beautiful Arab horse. 'All well! the

young lord and all. The Saracens, surprised, fled without ever guessing the number of their foes. The Sheik made prisoner in his tent. Ay, and a greater still, the Emir Hussein Bey, who had arrived to take possession of the castle only that very evening. What a ransom he would pay! Horses and all were taken, the spoil of the country round, and Master Sigbert had sent this palfrey for Lady Mabel to ride down.'

Perhaps Sigbert, in all his haste and occupation, had been able to discern that the gentle little mare was not likely to display the Arab steed's perilous attachment to a master, for Mabel was safely mounted, and ere sunrise was greeted by her joyous and victorious brother. 'Is not this noble, sister? Down went the Pagan dogs before my good sword! There are a score of them dragged off to the dead man's hollow for the jackals and vultures; but I kept one fellow uppermost to show you the gash I made! Come and see.'

Roger here observed that the horse might grow restive at the carcase, and Mabel was excused the sight, though Walter continued to relate his exploits, and demand whether he had not won his spurs by so grand a ruse and victory.

'Truly I think Sigbert has,' said his sister. 'It was all his doing.'

'Sigbert, an English churl! What are you thinking of, Mabel?'

'I am thinking to whom the honour is due.'

'You are a mere child, sister, or you would know better. Sigbert is a very fair squire; but what is a squire's business but to put his master in the way of honour? Do not talk such folly.'

Mabel was silenced, and after being conducted across the bare trampled ground among the tents of the Arabs, she re-entered the castle, where in the court groups of disarmed Arabs stood, their bournouses pulled over their brows, their long lances heaped in a corner, grim and disconsolate at their discomfiture and captivity.

A repast of stewed kid, fruit, and sherbet was prepared for her and her brother from the spoil, after which both were weary enough to throw themselves on their cushions for a long sound sleep.

Mabel slept the longer, and when she awoke, she found that the sun was setting, and that supper was nearly ready.

Walter met her just as she had arranged her dress, to bid nurse make ready her bales, for they

were to start at dawn on the morrow for Tiberias. It was quite possible that the enemy might return in force to deliver their Emir. A small garrison, freshly provisioned, could hold out the castle until relief could be sent ; but it would be best to conduct the two important prisoners direct to the King, to say nothing of Walter's desire to present them and to display these testimonies of his prowess before the Court of Jerusalem.

The Emir was a tall, slim, courteous Arab, with the exquisite manners of the desert. Both he and the Sheik were invited to the meal. Both looked startled and shocked at the entrance of the fair-haired damsel, and the Sheik crouched in a corner, with a savage glare in his eye like a freshly caught wild beast, though the Emir sat cross-legged on the couch eating, and talking in the *lingua Franca*, which was almost a native tongue, to the son and daughter of the Crusader. From him Walter learnt that King Fulk was probably at Tiberias, and this quickened the eagerness of all for a start. It took place in the earliest morning, so as to avoid the heat of the day. How different from the departure in the dark underground passage !

Horses enough had been captured to afford the

Emir and the Sheik each his own beautiful steed (the more readily that the creatures could hardly have been ridden by any one else), and their parole was trusted not to attempt to escape. Walter, Mabel, Sigbert, and Roger were also mounted, and asses were found in the camp for the nurse, and the men who had been hurt in the night's surprise.

The only mischance on the way was that in the noontide halt, just as the shimmer of the Lake of Galilee met their eyes, under a huge terebinth-tree, growing on a rock, when all, except Sigbert, had composed themselves to a siesta, there was a sudden sound of loud and angry altercation, and, as the sleepers started up, the Emir was seen grasping the bridle of the horse on which the Sheik sat downcast and abject under the storm of fierce indignant words hurled at him for thus degrading his tribe and all Islam by breaking his plighted word to the Christian.

This was in Arabic, and the Emir further insisted on his prostrating himself to ask pardon, while he himself in *lingua Franca* explained that the man was of a low and savage tribe of Bedouins, who knew not how to keep faith.

Walter broke out in loud threats, declaring that the traitor dog ought to be hung up at once on the

tree, or dragged along with hands tied behind him ; but Sigbert contented himself with placing a man at each side of his horse's head, as they proceeded on their way to the strongly fortified town of the ancient Herods, perched at the head of the dark gray Lake of Galilee, shut in by mountain peaks. The second part of the journey was necessarily begun in glowing heat, for it was most undesirable to have to spend a night in the open country, and it was needful to push on to a fortified hospice or monastery of St. John, which formed a half-way house.

Weary, dusty, athirst, they came in sight of it in the evening ; and Walter and Roger rode forward to request admittance. The porter begged them to wait when he heard that the party included women and Saracen prisoners ; and Walter began to storm. However, a few moments more brought a tall old Knight Hospitalier to the gate, and he made no difficulties as to lodging the Saracens in a building at the end of the Court, where they could be well guarded ; and Mabel and her nurse were received in a part of the precincts appropriated to female pilgrims.

It was a bare and empty place, a round turret over the gateway, with a stone floor, and a few mats

rolled up in the corner, mats which former pilgrims had not left in an inviting condition.

However, the notions of comfort of the twelfth century were not exacting. Water to wash away the dust of travel was brought to the door, and was followed by a substantial meal on roasted kid and thin cakes of bread. Sigbert came up with permission for the women to attend compline, though only strictly veiled; and Mabel knelt in the little cool cryptlike chapel, almost like the late place of her escape, and returned thanks for the deliverance from their recent peril.

Then, fresh mats and cushions having been supplied, the damsel and her nurse slept profoundly, and were only roused by a bell for a mass in the darkness just before dawn, after which they again set forth, the commander of the Hospice himself, and three or four knights, accompanying them, and conversing familiarly with the Emir on the current interests of Palestine.

About half-way onward, the glint and glitter of spears was seen amid a cloud of dust on the hill-path opposite. The troop drew together on their guard, though, as the Hospitalier observed, from the side of Tiberias an enemy could scarcely come. A scout was

sent forward to reconnoitre ; but, even before he came spurring joyously back, the golden crosses of Jerusalem had been recognised, and confirmed his tidings that it was the rearguard of the army, commanded by King Fulk himself, on the way to the relief of the Castle of Gebel-Aroun.

In a brief half-hour more, young Walter de Hundberg, with his sister by his side, was kneeling before an alert, slender, wiry figure in plain chamois leather, with a worn sunburnt face and keen blue eyes—Fulk of Anjou—who had resigned his French county to lead the crusading cause in Palestine.

‘Stand up, fair youth, and tell thy tale, and how thou hast forestalled our succour.’

Walter told his tale of the blockaded castle, the underground passage, and the dexterous surprise of the besiegers, ending by presenting, not ungracefully, his captives to the pleasure of the King.

‘Why, this is well done!’ exclaimed Fulk. ‘Thou art a youth of promise, and wilt well be a prop to our grandson’s English throne. Thou shalt take knighthood from mine own hand as thy prowess well deserveth. And thou, fair damsel, here is one whom we could scarce hold back from rushing with single hand to deliver his betrothed. Sir Raymond of Court-

wood, you are balked of winning thy lady at the sword's point, but thou wilt scarce rejoice the less.'

A dark-eyed, slender young knight, in bright armour, drew towards Mabel, and she let him take her hand; but she was intent on something else, and exclaimed—

'Oh, sir, Sir King, let me speak one word! The guerdon should not be only my brother's. The device that served us was—our squire's.'

The Baron of Courtwood uttered a fierce exclamation. Walter muttered, 'Mabel, do not be such a meddling fool'; but the King asked, 'And who may this same squire be?'

'An old English churl,' said Walter impatiently. 'My father took him as his squire for want of a better.'

'And he has been like a father to us,' added Mabel.

'Silence, sister! It is not for you to speak!' petulantly cried Walter. 'Not that the Baron of Courtwood need be jealous,' added he, laughing somewhat rudely. 'Where is the fellow? Stand forth, Sigbert.'

Travel and heat-soiled, sunburnt, gray, and ragged,

armour rusted, leathern garment stained, the rugged figure came forward, footsore and lame, for he had given up his horse to an exhausted man-at-arms. A laugh went round at the bare idea of the young lady's preferring such a form to the splendid young knight, her destined bridegroom.

'Is this the esquire who hath done such good service, according to the young lady?' asked the King.

'Ay, sir,' returned Walter; 'he is true and faithful enough, though nothing to be proud of in looks; and he served us well in my sally and attack.'

'It was his——' Mabel tried to say, but Sigbert hushed her.

'Let be, let be, my sweet lady; it was but my bounden duty.'

'What's that? Speak out what passes there,' demanded young Courtwood, half-jealously still.

'A mere English villein, little better than a valet of the camp!' were the exclamations around. 'A noble damsel take note of him! Fie for shame!'

'He has been true and brave,' said the King. 'Dost ask a guerdon for him, young sir?' he added to Walter.

'What wouldst have, old Sigbert?' asked Walter, in a patronising voice.

'I ask nothing, sir,' returned the old squire. 'To have seen my lord's children in safety is all I wish. I have but done my duty.'

King Fulk, who saw through the whole more clearly than some of those around, yet still had the true Angevin and Norman contempt for a Saxon, here said: 'Old man, thou art trusty and shrewd and mayst be useful. Wilt thou take service as one of my men-at-arms?'

'Thou mayst,' said Walter; 'thou art not bound to me. England hath enough of Saxon churls without thee, and I shall purvey myself an esquire of youthful grace and noble blood.'

Mabel looked at her betrothed and began to speak.

'No, no, sweet lady, I will have none of that rough, old masterful sort about me.'

'Sir King,' said Sigbert, 'I thank thee heartily. I would still serve the Cross; but my vow has been, when my young lord and lady should need me no more, to take the Cross of St. John with the Hospitalliers.'

'As a lay brother? Bethink thee,' said Fulk of

Anjou. 'Noble blood is needed for a Knight of the Order.'

Sigbert smiled slightly, in spite of all the sadness of his face, and the Knight Commander who had ridden with them, a Fleming by birth, said—

'For that matter, Sir King, we are satisfied. Sigbert, the son of Sigfrid, hath proved his descent from the old English kings of the East Saxons, and the Order will rejoice to enrol in the novitiate so experienced a warrior.'

'Is this indeed so?' asked Fulk. 'A good lineage, even if English!'

'But rebel,' muttered Courtwood.

'It is so, Sir King,' said Sigbert. 'My father was disseised of the lands of Hundberg, and died in the fens fighting under Hereward le Wake. My mother dwelt under the protection of the Abbey of Colchester, and, by and by, I served under our Atheling, and, when King Henry's wars in Normandy were over, I followed the Lord of Hundberg's banner, because the men-at-arms were mine own neighbours, and his lady my kinswoman. Roger can testify to my birth and lineage.'

'So, thou art true heir of Hundberg, if that be the name of thine English castle?'

'Ay, sir, save for the Norman! But I would not, if I could, meddle with thee, my young lord, though thou dost look at me askance, spite of having learnt of me to ride and use thy lance. I am the last of the English line of old Sigfrid the Wormbane, and a childless man, and I trust the land and the serfs will be well with thee, who art English born, and son to Wulfrida of Lexden. And I trust that thou, my sweet Lady Mabel, will be a happy bride and wife. All I look for is to end my days under the Cross, in the cause of the Holy Sepulchre, whether as warrior or lay brother. Yes, dear lady, that is enough for old Sigbert.'

And Mabel had to acquiesce and believe that her old friend found peace and gladness beneath the eight-pointed Cross, when she and her brother sailed for England, where she would behold the green fields and purple heather of which he had told her amid the rocks of Palestine.

Moreover, she thought of him when on her way through France, she heard the young monk Bernard, then rising into fame, preach on the beleaguered city, saved by the poor wise man; and tell how, when the city was safe, none remembered the poor man. True, the preacher gave it a mystic meaning,

and interpreted it as meaning the emphatically Poor Man by Whom Salvation came, and Whom too few bear in mind. Yet such a higher meaning did not exclude the thought of one whose deserts surpassed his honours here on earth.

THE BEGGAR'S LEGACY

AN Alderman bold, Henry Smith was enrolled,
Of the Silversmiths' Company ;
Highly praised was his name, his skill had high fame,
And a prosperous man was he.

Knights drank to his health, and lauded his wealth ;
Sailors came from the Western Main,
Their prizes they sold, of ingots of gold,
Or plate from the galleys of Spain.

Then beakers full fine, to hold the red wine,
Were cast in his furnace's mould,
Or tankards rich chased, in intricate taste,
Gimmal rings of the purest gold.

On each New Year's morn, no man thought it scorn—
Whether statesman, or warrior brave—
The choicest device, of costliest price,
For a royal offering to crave.


‘Bring here such a toy as the most may joy
The eyes of our gracious Queen,
Rows of orient pearls, gold pins for her curls,
Silver network, all glistening sheen.’

Each buyer who came—lord, squire, or dame—
Behaved in most courteous guise,
Showing honour due, as to one they knew
To be at once wealthy and wise.

In London Guild Hall, the citizens all,
Esteemed him their future Lord Mayor;
Not one did he meet, in market or street,
But made him a reverence fair.

‘Ho,’ said Master Smith, ‘I will try the pith
Of this smooth-faced courtesy;
Do they prize myself, do they prize my pelf,
Do they value what’s mine or me?’

His gold chain of pride he hath laid aside,
And furred gown of the scarlet red;
He set on his back a fardel and pack,
And a hood on his grizzled head.



His 'prentices all he hath left in stall,
But running right close by his side,
In spite of his rags, guarding well his bags,
His small Messan dog would abide.

So thus, up and down, through village and town,
In rain or in sunny weather,
Through Surrey's fair land, his staff in his hand,
Went he and the dog together.

' Good folk, hear my prayer, of your bounty spare,
Help a wanderer in his need ;
Better days I have seen, a rich man I have been,
Esteemed both in word and deed.'

In the first long street, certain forms he did meet,
But scarce might behold their faces ;
From matted elf-locks eyes stared like an ox,
And shambling were their paces !

Not one gave him cheer, nor would one come near,
As he turned him away to go,
Then a heavy stone at the dog was thrown,
To deal a right cowardly blow.

In Mitcham's fair vale, the men 'gan to rail,
'Not a vagabond may come near ;'
Each mother's son ran, each boy and each man,
To summon the constable here.

The cart's tail behind, the beggar they bind,
They flogged him full long and full sore ;
They hunted him out, did that rabble rout,
And bade him come thither no more !

All weary and bruised, and scurvily used,
He went trudging along his track ;
The lesson was stern he had come to learn,
And yet he disdained to turn back.

Where Walton-on-Thames gleams fair through the
stems
Of its tufted willow palms,
There were loitering folk who most vilely spoke,
Nor would give him one groat in alms

'Dog Smith,' was the cry, 'behold him go by,
The fool who hath lost all he had !'
For only to tease can delight and can please
The ill-nurtured village lad.

Béhold, in Betchworth was a blazing hearth
With a hospitable door.

'Thou art tired and lame,' quoth a kindly dame,
'Come taste of our humble store.

'Though scant be our fare, thou art welcome to share ;
We rejoice to give thee our best ;
Come sit by our fire, thou weary old sire,
Come in, little doggie, and rest.'

And where Mole the slow doth by Cobham go,
He beheld a small village maiden ;
Of loose flocks of wool her lap was quite full,
With a bundle her arms were laden.

'What seekest thou, child, 'mid the bushes wild,
Thy face and thine arms that thus tear ?'
'The wool the sheep leave, to spin and to weave ;
It makes us our clothes to wear.'

Then she led him in, where her mother did spin,
And make barley bannocks to eat ;
They gave him enough, though the food was rough—
The kindliness made it most sweet.

Many years had past, report ran at last,
The rich Alderman Smith was dead.
Then each knight and dame, and each merchant came,
To hear his last testament read. -

‘ I, Harry Smith, found of mind clear and sound,
Thus make and devise my last will :
While England shall stand, I bequeath my land,
My last legacies to fulfil.

‘ To the muddy spot, where they cleaned them not,
When amongst their fields I did roam ;
To every one there with the unkempt hair
I bequeath a small-toothed comb.

‘ Next, to Mitcham proud, and the gaping crowd,
Who for nobody’s sorrows grieve ;
With a lash double-thong, plaited firm and strong,
A horsewhip full stout do I leave.

‘ To Walton-on-Thames, where, ’mid willow stems,
The lads and the lasses idle ;
To restrain their tongues, and breath of their lungs,
I bequeath a bit and a bridle.

'To Betchworth so fair, and the households there
Who so well did the stranger cheer,
I leave as my doles to the pious souls,
Full seventy pounds by the year.

'To Cobham the thrifty I leave a good fifty,
To be laid out in cloth dyed dark ;
On Sabbath-day to be given away,
And known by Smith's badge and mark.

'To Leatherhead too my gratitude's due,
For a welcome most freely given ;
Let my bounty remain, for each village to gain,
Whence the poor man was never driven.'


So in each sweet dale, and bright sunny vale,
In the garden of England blest ;
Those have found a friend, whose gifts do not end,
Who gave to that stranger a rest !

Henry Smith's history is literally true. He was a silversmith of immense wealth in London in the latter part of the sixteenth century, but in his later years he chose to perambulate the county of Surrey as a beggar, and was known as 'Dog Smith.' He

met with various fortune in different parishes, and at Mitcham was flogged at the cart's tail. On his death, apparently in 1627, he was found to have left bequests to almost every place in Surrey, according to the manners of the inhabitants—to Mitcham a horse-whip, to Walton-on-Thames a bridle, to Betchworth, Leatherhead, and many more, endowments which produce from £50 to £75 a year, and to Cobham a sum to be spent annually in woollen cloth of a uniform colour, bearing Smith's badge, to be given away in church to the poor and impotent, as the following tablet still records :—

1627

Item—That the Gift to the impotent and aged poor people, shall be bestowed in Apparell of one Coulour, with some Badge or other Mark, that it may be known to be the Gift of the said Henry Smith, or else in Bread, flesh, or fish on the Sabbath-day publickly in the Church. In Witness whereof the said Henry Smith did put to his Hand and seal the Twenty-first day of January in the Second Year of the Reign of our most gracious Sovereign Lord King Charles the First.




A REVIEW OF NIECES

GENERAL SIR EDWARD FULFORD, K.G.C., *to his sister*
MISS FULFORD

UNITED SERVICE CLUB, 29th June.

MY DEAR CHARLOTTE,—I find I shall need at least a month to get through the necessary business; so that I shall only have a week at last for my dear mother and the party collected at New Cove. You will have ample time to decide which of the nieces shall be asked to accompany us, but you had better give no hint of the plan till you have studied them thoroughly. After all the years that you have accompanied me on all my stations, you know how much depends on the young lady of our house being one able to make things pleasant to the strange varieties who will claim our hospitality in a place like Malta, yet not likely to flag if left in solitude with you. She must be used enough to society to do the honours



genially and gracefully, and not have her head turned by being the chief young lady in the place. She ought to be well bred, if not high bred, enough to give a tone to the society of her contemporaries, and above all she must not flirt. If I found flirtation going on with the officers, I should send her home on the spot. Of course, all this means that she must have the only real spring of good breeding, and be a thoroughly good, religious, unselfish, right-minded girl; otherwise we should have to rue our scheme. In spite of all you would do towards moulding and training a young maiden, there will be so many distractions and unavoidable counter-influences that the experiment would be too hazardous, unless there were a character and manners ready formed. There ought likewise to be cultivation and intelligence to profit by the opportunities she will have. I should not like Greece and Italy, to say nothing of Egypt and Palestine, to be only so much gape seed. You must have an eye likewise to good temper, equal to cope with the various emergencies of travelling. *N.B.* You should have more than one in your eye, for probably the first choice will be of some one too precious to be attainable.—Your affectionate brother,

EDWARD FULFORD.

MISS FULFORD to SIR EDWARD FULFORD

1 SHINGLE COTTAGES, NEW COVE, S. CLEMENTS,
30th June.

MY DEAR EDWARD,—When Sydney Smith led Perfection to the Pea because the Pea would not come to Perfection, he could hardly have had such an ideal as yours. Your intended niece is much like the 'not impossible she' of a youth under twenty. One comfort is that such is the blindness of your kind that you will imagine all these charms in whatever good, ladylike, simple-hearted girl I pitch upon, and such I am sure I shall find all my nieces. The only difficulty will be in deciding, and that will be fixed by details of style, and the parents' willingness to spare their child.

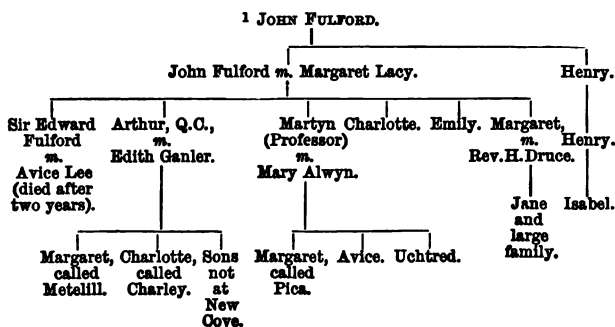
This is an excellent plan of yours for bringing the whole family together round our dear old mother and her home daughter. This is the end house of three on a little promontory, and has a charming view—of the sea in the first place, and then on the one side of what is called by courtesy the parade, on the top of the sea wall where there is a broad walk leading to S. Clements, nearly two miles off. There are not above

a dozen houses altogether, and the hotel is taken for the two families from London and Oxford, while the Druces are to be in the house but one next to us, the middle one being unluckily let off to various inhabitants. We have one bedroom free where we may lodge some of the overflowings, and I believe the whole party are to take their chief meals together in the large room at the hotel. The houses are mostly scattered, being such as fortunate skippers build as an investment, and that their wives may amuse themselves with lodgers in their absence. The church is the weakest point in this otherwise charming place. The nearest, and actually the parish church, is a hideous compo structure, built in the worst of times as a chapel of ease to S. Clements. I am afraid my mother's loyalty to the parochial system will make her secure a pew there, though at the farther end of the town there is a new church which is all that can be wished, and about a mile and a half inland there is a village church called Hollyford, held, I believe, by a former fellow-curate of Horace Druce. Perhaps they will exchange duties, if Horace can be persuaded to take a longer holiday than merely for the three weeks he has provided for at Bourne Parva. They cannot come till Monday


week, but our Oxford professor and his party come on Thursday, and Edith will bring her girls the next day. Her husband, our Q.C., cannot come till his circuit is over, but of course you know more about his movements than I do. I wonder you have never said anything about those girls of his, but I suppose you class them as unattainable. I have said nothing to my mother or Emily of our plans, as I wish to be perfectly unbiassed, and as I have seen none of the nieces for five years, and am prepared to delight in them all, I may be reckoned as a blank sheet as to their merits.—Your affectionate sister,

CHARLOTTE FULFORD.

July 4.—By noon to-day arrived Martyn,¹ with Mary his wife, Margaret and Avice their daughters, Uchtred their second son, and poor Harry Fulford's



orphan, Isabel, who has had a home with them ever since she left school. Though she is only a cousin once removed, she seems to fall into the category of eligible nieces, and indeed she seems the obvious companion for us, as she has no home, and seems to me rather set aside among the others. I hope there is no jealousy, for she is much better looking than her cousins, with gentle, liquid eyes, a pretty complexion, and a wistful expression. Moreover, she is dressed in a quiet ladylike way, whereas grand-mamma looked out just now in the twilight and said, 'My dear Martyn, have you brought three boys down?' It was a showery, chilly evening, and they were all out admiring the waves. Ulsters and sailor hats were appropriate enough then, but the genders were not easy to distinguish, especially as the elder girl wears her hair short—no improvement to a keen face which needs softening. She is much too like a callow undergraduate altogether, and her sister follows suit, though perhaps with more refinement of feature—indeed she looks delicate, and was soon called in. They are in slight mourning, and appear in gray serges. They left a strap of books on the sofa, of somewhat alarming light literature for the seaside. Bacon's *Essays and Elements of Logic* were the first




Emily beheld, and while she stood regarding them with mingled horror and respect, in ran Avice to fetch them, as the two sisters are reading up for the Oxford exam—'ination' she added when she saw her two feeble-minded aunts looking for the rest of the word. However, she says it is only Pica who is going up for it this time. She herself was not considered strong enough. Yet there have those two set themselves down with their books under the rocks, blind to all the glory of sea and shore, deaf to the dash and ripple of the waves! I long to go and shout Wordsworth's warning about 'growing double' to them. I am glad to say that Uchtred has come and fetched Avice away. I can hardly believe Martyn and Mary parents to this grown-up family. They look as youthful as ever, and are as active and vigorous, and full of their jokes with one another and their children. They are now gone out to the point of the rocks at the end of our promontory, fishing for microscopical monsters, and comporting themselves boy and girl fashion.


Isabel has meantime been chatting very pleasantly with grandmamma, and trying to extricate us from our bewilderment as to names and nicknames. My poor mother, after strenuously preventing abbreviations

in her own family, has to endure them in her descendants, and as every one names a daughter after her, there is some excuse! This Oxford Margaret goes by the name of Pie or Pica, apparently because it is the remotest portion of Magpie, and her London cousin is universally known as Metelill—the Danish form, I believe; but in the Bourne Parva family the young Margaret Druce is nothing worse than Meg, and her elder sister remains Jane. ‘Nobody would dare to call her anything else,’ says Isa. *Avice* cannot but be sometimes translated into the Bird; while my poor name, in my second London niece, has become the masculine Charley. ‘I shall know why when I see her,’ says Isa laughing. This good-natured damsel is coming out walking with us old folks, and will walk on with me, when grandmamma turns back with Emily. Her great desire is to find the whereabouts of a convalescent home in which she and her cousins have subscribed to place a poor young dressmaker for a six weeks’ rest; but I am afraid it is on the opposite side of S. Clements, too far for a walk.

July 5.—Why did you never tell me how charming Metelill is? I never supposed the Fulford features capable of so much beauty, and the whole



manner and address are so delightful that I do not wonder that all her cousins are devoted to her; Uchtred, or Butts, as they are pleased to name him, has brightened into another creature since she came, and she seems like sunshine to us all. As to my namesake, I am sorry to say that I perceive the appropriateness of Charley; but I suppose it is style, for the masculine dress which in Pica and Avice has an air of being worn for mere convenience' sake, and is quite ladylike, especially on Avice, has in her an appearance of defiance and coquetry. Her fox-terrier always shares her room, which therefore is eschewed by her sister, and this has made a change in our arrangements. We had thought the room in our house, which it seems is an object of competition, would suit best for Jane Druce and one of her little sisters; but a hint was given by either Pica or her mother that it would be a great boon to let Jane and Avice share it, as they are very great friends, and we had the latter there installed. However, this fox-terrier made Metelill protest against sleeping at the hotel with her sister, and her mother begged us to take her in. Thereupon, Emily saw Isa looking annoyed, and on inquiry she replied sweetly, 'Oh, never mind, aunty dear; I daresay Wasp won't be




so bad as he looks; and I'll try not to be silly, and then I daresay Charley will not tease me! Only I had hoped to be with dear Metelill; but no doubt she will prefer her Bird—people always do.' So they were going to make that poor child the victim! For it seems Pica has a room to herself, and will not give it up or take in any one. Emily went at once to Avice and asked whether she would mind going to the hotel, and letting Isa be with Metelill, and this she agreed to at once. I don't know why I tell you all these details, except that they are straws to show the way of the wind, and you will see how Isabel is always the sacrifice, unless some one stands up for her. Here comes Martyn to beguile me out to the beach.

July 6 (Sunday).—My mother drove to church and took Edith, who was glad neither to walk nor to have to skirmish for a seat. Isa walked with Emily and me, and so we made up our five for our seat, which, to our dismay, is in the gallery, but, happily for my mother, the stairs are easy. The pews there are not quite so close to one's nose as those in the body of the church; they are a little wider, and are furnished with hassocks instead of traps to prevent kneeling, so that we think ourselves well off, and we

were agreeably surprised at the service. There is a new incumbent who is striving to modify things as well as his people and their architecture permit, and who preached an excellent sermon. So we triumph over the young folk, who try to persuade us that the gallery is a judgment on us for giving in to the hired pew system. They may banter me as much as they like, but I don't like to see them jest with grand-mamma about it, as if they were on equal terms, and she does not understand it either. 'My dear,' she gravely says, 'your grandpapa always said it was a duty to support the parish church.' 'Nothing will do but the Congregational system in these days; don't you think so?' began Pica dogmatically, when her father called her off. Martyn cannot bear to see his mother teased. He and his wife, with the young ones, made their way to Hollyford, where they found a primitive old church and a service to match, but were terribly late, and had to sit in worm-eaten pews near the door, amid scents of peppermint and southernwood. On the way back, Martyn fraternised with a Mr. Methuen, a Cambridge tutor with a reading party, who has, I am sorry to say, arrived at the house *vis-à-vis* to ours, on the other side of the cove. Our Oxford young ladies turn up their noses at the


light blue, and say the men have not the finish of the dark; but Charley is in wild spirits. I heard her announcing the arrival thus: 'I say, Isa, what a stunning lark! Not but that I was up to it all the time, or else I should have skedaddled; for this place was bound to be as dull as ditchwater.' 'But how did you know?' asked Isa. 'Why, Bertie Elwood tipped me a line that he was coming down here with his coach, or else I should have told the mater I couldn't stand it and gone to stay with some one.' This Bertie Elwood is, it seems, one of the many London acquaintance. He looks inoffensive, and so do the others, but I wish they had chosen some other spot for their studies, and so perhaps does their tutor, though he is now smoking very happily under a rock with Martyn.

July 7.—Such a delightful evening walk with Metelill and Isa as Emily and I had last night, going to evensong in our despised church! The others said they could stand no more walking and heat, and yet we met Martyn and Mary out upon the rocks when we were coming home, after being, I must confess, nearly fried to death by the gas and bad air. They laughed at us and our exertions, all in the way of good humour, but it was not wholesome from




parents. Mary tried to make me confess that we were coming home in a self-complacent fakir state of triumph in our headaches, much inferior to her humble revelling in cool sea, sky, and moonlight. It was like the difference between the *Benedicite* and the *Te Deum*, I could not help thinking; while Emily said a few words to Martyn as to how mamma would be disappointed at his absenting himself from Church, and was answered, 'Ah! Emily, you are still the good home child of the primitive era,' which she did not understand; but I faced about and asked if it were not what we all should be. He answered rather sadly, 'If we could'; and his wife shrugged her shoulders. Alas! I fear the nineteenth century tone has penetrated them, and do not wonder that this poor Isabel does not seem happy in her home.

9.—What a delightful sight is a large family of young things together! The party is complete, for the Druces arrived yesterday evening in full force, torn from their bucolic life, as Martyn tells them. My poor dear old Margaret! She does indeed look worn and aged, dragged by cares like a colonist's wife, and her husband is quite bald, and as spare as a hermit. It is hard to believe him younger than Martyn; but then his whole soul is set on Bourne




Parva, and hers on him, on the children, on the work, and on making both ends meet ; and they toil five times more severely in one month than the professor and his lady in a year, besides having just twice as many children, all of whom are here except the schoolboys. Margaret declares that the entire rest, and the talking to something not entirely rural, will wind her husband up for the year ; and it is good to see her sitting in a basket-chair by my mother, knitting indeed, but they both do that like breathing, while they purr away to one another in a state of perfect repose and felicity. Meantime her husband talks Oxford with Martyn and Mary. Their daughter Jane seems to be a most valuable helper to both, but she too has a worn, anxious countenance, and I fear she may be getting less rest than her parents, as they have brought only one young nursemaid with them, and seem to depend on her and Meg for keeping the middle-sized children in order. She seems to have all the cares of the world on her young brow, and is much exercised about one of the boxes which has gone astray on the railway. What do you think she did this morning ? She started off with Avice at eight o'clock for the S. Clements station to see if the telegram was answered, and they went on to the



Convalescent Home and saw the Oxford dressmaker. It seems that Avice had taken Uchtred with her on Sunday evening, made out the place, and gone to church at S. Clements close by—a very long walk; but it seems that those foolish girls thought me too fine a lady to like to be seen with her in her round hat on a Sunday. I wish they could understand what it is that I dislike. If I objected to appearances, I am afraid the poor Druces would fare ill. Margaret's girls cannot help being essentially ladies, but they have not much beauty to begin with—and their dress! It was chiefly made by their own sewing machine, with the assistance of the Bourne Parva mantua-maker, superintended by Jane, 'to prevent her from making it foolish'; and the effect, I grieve to say, is ill-fitting dowdiness, which becomes grotesque from their self-complacent belief that it displays the only graceful and sensible fashion in the place. It was laughable to hear them criticising every hat or costume they have seen, quite unaware that they were stared at themselves, till Charley told them people thought they had come fresh out of Lady Bountiful's goody-box, which piece of impertinence they took as a great compliment to their wisdom and excellence. To be sure, the fashions


are distressing enough, but Metelill shows that they can be treated gracefully and becomingly, and even Avice makes her serge and hat look fresh and lady-like. Spite of contrast, Avice and Jane seem to be much devoted to each other. Pica and Charley are another pair, and Isa and Metelill—though Metelill is the universal favourite, and there is always competition for her. In early morning I see the brown heads and blue bathing-dresses, a-mermaiding, as they call it, in the cove below, and they come in all glowing, with the floating tresses that make Metelill look so charming, and full of merry adventures at breakfast. We all meet in the great room at the hotel for a substantial meal at half-past one, and again (most of us at least) at eight; but it is a moot point which of these meals we call dinner. Very merry both of them are; Martyn and Horace Druce are like boys together, and the girls scream with laughter, rather too much so sometimes. Charley is very noisy, and so is Meg Druce, when not overpowered by shyness. She will not exchange a sentence with any of the elders, but in the general laugh she chuckles and shrieks like a young Cochin-Chinese chicken learning to crow; and I hear her squealing like a maniac while she is shrimping with the



younger ones and Charley. I must except those two young ladies from the unconscious competition, for one has no manners at all, and the other affects those of a man ; but as to the rest, they are all as nice as possible, and I can only say, 'How happy could I be with either.' Isa, poor girl, seems to need our care most, and would be the most obliging and attentive. Metelill would be the prettiest and sweetest ornament of our drawing-room, and would amuse you the most ; Pica, with her scholarly tastes, would be the best and most appreciative fellow-traveller ; and Jane, if she could or would go, would perhaps benefit the most by being freed from a heavy strain, and having her views enlarged.

10.—A worthy girl is Jane Druce, but I fear the Vicarage is no school of manners. Her mother is sitting with us, and has been discoursing to grand-mamma on her Jane's wonderful helpfulness and activity in house and parish, and how everything hinged on her last winter when they had whooping-cough everywhere in and out of doors ; indeed she doubts whether the girl has ever quite thrown off the effects of all her exertions then. Suddenly comes a trampling, a bounce and a rush, and in dashes Miss Jane, fiercely demanding whether the children had

leave to go to the cove. Poor Margaret meekly responds that she had consented. 'And didn't you know,' exclaims the damsel, 'that all their everyday boots are in that unlucky trunk?' There is a humble murmur that Chattie had promised to be very careful, but it produces a hotter reply. 'As if Chattie's promises of that kind could be trusted! And I had *told* them that they were to keep with baby on the cliff!' Then came a real apology for interfering with Jane's plans, to which we listened aghast, and Margaret was actually getting up to go and look after her amphibious offspring herself, when her daughter cut her off short with, 'Nonsense, mamma, you know you are not to do any such thing! I must go, that's all, or they won't have a decent boot or stocking left among them.' Off she went with another bang, while her mother began blaming herself for having yielded in haste to the persuasions of the little ones, oblivious of the boots, thus sacrificing Jane's happy morning with Avicé. My mother showed herself shocked by the tone in which Margaret had let herself be hectored, and this brought a torrent of almost tearful apologies from the poor dear thing, knowing she did not keep up her authority or make herself respected as would be good for her girl,



but if we only knew how devoted Jane was, and how much, there was to grind and try her temper, we should not wonder that it gave way sometimes. Indeed it was needful to turn away the subject, as Margaret was the last person we wished to distress.

Jane could have shown no temper to the children, for at dinner a roly-poly person of five years old, who seems to absorb all the fat in the family, made known that he had had a very jolly day, and he loved cousin Avice very much indeed, and sister Janie very much indeeder, and he could with difficulty be restrained from an expedition to kiss them both then and there.


The lost box was announced while we were at dinner, and Jane is gone with her faithful Avice to unpack it. Her mother would have done it and sent her boating with the rest, but submitted as usual when commanded to adhere to the former plan of driving with grandmamma. These Druce children must be excellent, according to their mother, but they are terribly brusque and bearish. They are either seen and not heard, or not seen and heard a great deal too much. Even Jane and Meg, who ought to know better, keep up a perpetual under-

current of chatter and giggle, whatever is going on, with any one who will share it with them.

10.—I am more and more puzzled about the new reading of the Fifth Commandment. None seem to understand it as we used to do. The parents are content to be used as equals, and to be called by all sorts of absurd names; and though grandmamma is always kindly and attentively treated, there is no reverence for the relationship. I heard Charley call her ‘a jolly old party,’ and Metelill respond that she was ‘a sweet old thing.’ Why, we should have thought such expressions about our grandmother a sort of sacrilege, but when I ventured to hint as much Charley flippantly answered, ‘Gracious me, we are not going back to buckram’; and Metelill, with her caressing way, declared that she loved dear granny too much to be so stiff and formal. I quoted—

‘If I be a Father, where is My honour?’


And one of them taking it, I am sorry to say, for a line of secular poetry, exclaimed at the stiffness and coldness. Pica then put in her oar, and began to argue that honour must be earned, and that it was absurd and illogical to claim it for the mere accident of seniority or relationship. Jane, not at all conscious



of being an offender, howled at her that this was her horrible liberalism and neology, while Metelill asked what was become of loyalty. 'That depends on what you mean by it,' returned our girl graduate. '*Loi-aulé*, steadfastness to principle, is noble, but personal loyalty, to some mere puppet or the bush the crown hangs on, is a pernicious figment.' Charley shouted that this was the No. 1 letter A point in Pie's prize essay, and there the discussion ended, Isa only sighing to herself, 'Ah, if I had any one to be loyal to!'


'How you would jockey them!' cried Charley, turning upon her so roughly that the tears came into her eyes; and I must have put on what you call my Government-house look, for Charley subsided instantly.

11.—Here was a test as to this same obedience. The pupils, who are by this time familiars of the party, had devised a boating and fishing expedition for all the enterprising, which was satisfactory to the elders because it was to include both the fathers. Unluckily, however, this morning's post brought a summons to Martyn and Mary to fulfil an engagement they have long made to meet an American professor at —, and they had to start off at eleven



o'clock; and at the same time the Hollyford clergyman, an old fellow-curate of Horace Druce, sent a note imploring him to take a funeral. So the voice of the seniors was for putting off the expedition, but the voice of the juniors was quite the other way. The three families took different lines. The Druces show obedience though not respect; they growled and grumbled horribly, but submitted, though with ill grace, to the explicit prohibition. Non-interference is professedly Mary's principle, but even she said, with entreaty veiled beneath the playfulness, when it was pleaded that two of the youths had oars at Cambridge, 'Freshwater fish, my dears. I wish you would wait for us! I don't want you to attend the submarine wedding of our old friends Tame and Isis.' To which Pica rejoined, likewise talking out of Spenser, that Proteus would provide a nice ancient nymph to tend on them. Her father then chimed in, saying, 'You will spare our nerves by keeping to dry land unless you can secure the ancient mariner who was with us yesterday.'

'Come, come, most illustrious,' said Pica good-humouredly, 'I'm not going to encourage you to set up for nerves. You are much better without them, and I must get some medusæ.'




It ended with, 'I beg you will not go without that old man,' the most authoritative speech I have heard either Martyn or Mary make to their daughters; but it was so much breath wasted on Pica, who maintains her right to judge for herself. The ancient mariner had been voted an encumbrance and exchanged for a jolly young waterman.

Our other mother, Edith, implored, and was laughed down by Charley, who declared she could swim, and that she did not think Uncle Martyn would have been so old-womanish. Metelill was so tender and caressing with her frightened mother that I thought here at last was submission, and with a good grace. But after a turn on the esplanade among the pupils, back came Metelill in a hurry to say, 'Dear mother, will you very much *mind* if I go? They will be so disappointed, and there will be such a fuss if I don't; and Charley really ought to have some one with her besides Pie, who will heed nothing but magnifying medusæ.' I am afraid it is true, as Isa says, that it was all owing to the walk with that young Mr. Horne.

Poor Edith fell into such a state of nervous anxiety that I could not leave her, and she confided to me how Charley had caught her foolish masculine


affectations in the family of this very Bertie Elwood, and told me of the danger of an attachment between Metelill and a young government clerk who is always on the look-out for her. 'And dear Metelill is so gentle and gracious that she cannot bear to repel any one,' says the mother, who would, I see, be thankful to part with either daughter to our keeping in hopes of breaking off perilous habits. I was saved, however, from committing myself by the coming in of Isabel. That child follows me about like a tame cat, and seems so to need mothering that I cannot bear to snub her.

She came to propound to me a notion that has risen among these Oxford girls, namely, that I should take out their convalescent dressmaker as my maid instead of poor Amélie. She is quite well now, and going back next week; but a few years in a warm climate might be the saving of her health. So I agreed to go with Isa to look at her, and judge whether the charming account I heard was all youthful enthusiasm. Edith went out driving with my mother, and we began our *tête-à-tête* walk, in which I heard a great deal of the difficulties of that free-and-easy house at Oxford, and how often Isa wishes for some one who would be a real guide and



helper, instead of only giving a playful, slap-dash answer, like good-natured mockery. The treatment may suit Mary's own daughters, but 'Just as you please, my dear,' is not good for sensitive, anxious spirits. We passed Jane and Avice reading together under a rock; I was much inclined to ask them to join us, but Isa was sure they were much happier undisturbed, and she was so unwilling to share me with any one that I let them alone. I was much pleased with the dressmaker, Maude Harris, who is a nice, modest, refined girl, and if the accounts I get from her employers bear out what I hear of her, I shall engage her; I shall be glad, for the niece's sake, to have that sort of young woman about the place. She speaks most warmly of what the Misses Fulford have done for her.


Jane will be disappointed if I cannot have her rival candidate—a pet schoolgirl who works under the Bourne Parva dressmaker. 'What a recommendation!' cries Pica, and there is a burst of mirth, at which Jane looks round and says, 'What is there to laugh at? Miss Dadworthy is a real good woman, and a real old Bourne Parva person, so that you may be quite sure Martha will have learnt no nonsense to begin with.'



‘No,’ says Pica, ‘from all such pomps and vanities as style, she will be quite clear.’

While Avice’s friendship goes as far as to say that if Aunt Charlotte cannot have Maude, perhaps Martha could get a little more training. Whereupon Jane runs off by the yard explanations of the admirable training—religious, moral, and intellectual—of Bourne Parva, illustrated by the best answers of her favourite scholars, anecdotes of them, and the reports of the inspectors, religious and secular; and Avice listens with patience, nay, with respectful sympathy.

12.—We miss Mary and Martyn more than I expected. Careless and easy-going as they seem, they made a difference in the ways of the young people; they were always about with them, not as dragons, but for their own pleasure. The presence of a professor must needs impose upon young men, and Mary, with her brilliant wit and charming manners, was a check without knowing it. The boating party came back gay and triumphant, and the young men joined in our late meal; and oh, what a noise there was! though I must confess that it was not they who made the most. Metelill was not guilty of the noise, but she was—I fear I must say it—flirting with all her might with a youth on



each side of her, and teasing a third ; I am afraid she is one of those girls who are charming to all, and doubly charming to your sex, and that it will never do to have her among the staff. I don't think it is old-maidish in us to be scandalised at her walking up and down the esplanade with young Horne till ten o'clock last night; Charley was behind with Bertie Elwood, and, I grieve to say, was smoking. It lasted till Horace Druce went out to tell them that Metelill must come in at once, as it was time to shut up the house.


The Oxford girls were safe indoors ; Isa working chess problems with another of the lads, Avice keeping Jane company over the putting the little ones to sleep—in Mount Lebanon, as they call the Druce lodging—and Pica preserving microscopic objects. 'Isn't she awful?' said one of those pupils. 'She's worse than all the dons in Cambridge. She wants to be at it all day long, and all through the vacation.'

They perfectly flee from her. They say she is always whipping out a microscope and lecturing upon protoplasms—and there is some truth in the accusation. She is almost as bad on the emancipation of women, on which there is a standing battle, in earnest with Jane—in joke with Metelill; but it has, by

special orders, to be hushed at dinner, because it almost terrifies grandmamma. I fear Pica tries to despise her!

This morning the girls are all out on the beach in pairs and threes, the pupils being all happily shut up with their tutor. I see the invalid lady creep out with her beach-rest from the intermediate house, and come down to her usual morning station in the shade of a rock, unaware, poor thing, that it has been monopolised by Isa and Metelill. Oh, girls! why don't you get up and make room for her? No.; she moves on to the next shady place, but there Pica has a perfect fortification of books spread on her rug, and Charley is sketching on the outskirts, and the fox-terrier barks loudly. Will she go on to the third seat? where I can see, though she cannot, Jane and Avice sitting together, and Freddy shovelling sand at their feet. Ah! at last she is made welcome. Good girls! They have seated her and her things, planted a parasol to shelter her from the wind, and lingered long enough not to make her feel herself turning them out before making another settlement out of my sight.

Three o'clock.—I am sorry to say Charley's sketch turned into a caricature of the unprotected female



wandering in vain in search of a bit of shelter, with a torn parasol, a limp dress, and dragging rug, and altogether unspeakably forlorn. It was exhibited at the dinner-table, and elicited peals of merriment, so that we elders begged to see the cause of the young people's amusement. My blood was up, and when I saw what it was, I said—

‘I wonder you like to record your own discourtesy, to call it nothing worse.’

‘But, Aunt Charlotte,’ said Metelill in her pretty pleading way, ‘we did not know her.’

‘Well, what of that?’ I said.


‘Oh, you know it is only abroad that people expect that sort of things from strangers.’

‘One of the worst imputations on English manners I ever heard,’ I said.

‘But she was such a guy!’ cried Charley. ‘Mother said she was sure she was not a lady.’

‘And therefore you did not show yourself one,’ I could not but return.


There her mother put in a gentle entreaty that Charley would not distress grandmamma with these loud arguments with her aunt, and I added, seeing that Horace Druce's attention was attracted, that I should like to have added another drawing



called 'Courtesy,' and shown that there was *some* hospitality *even* to strangers, and then I asked the two girls about her. They had joined company again, and carried her beach-rest home for her, finding out by the way that she was a poor homeless governess who had come down to stay in cheap lodgings with an old nurse to try to recruit herself till she could go out again. My mother became immediately interested, and has sent Emily to call on her, and to try and find out whether she is properly taken care of.

Isa was very much upset at my displeasure. She came to me afterwards and said she was greatly grieved; but Metelill would not move, and she had always supposed it wrong to make acquaintance with strangers in that chance way. I represented that making room was not picking up acquaintance, and she owned it, and was really grateful for the reproof; but, as I told her, no doubt such a rule must be necessary in a place like Oxford.

How curiously Christian courtesy and polished manners sometimes separate themselves! and how conceit interferes with both! I acquit Metelill and Isa of all but thoughtless habit, and Pica was absorbed. She can be well mannered enough when she is not defending the rights of woman, or hotly dogmatical



on the crude theories she has caught—and suppose she has thought out, poor child! And Jane, though high-principled, kind, and self-sacrificing, is too narrow and—not exactly conceited—but exclusive and Bourne Parvaish, not to be as bad in her way, though it is the sound one. The wars of the Druces and Maronites, as Martyn calls them, sometimes rage beyond the bounds of good humour.

Ten P.M.—I am vexed too on another score. I must tell you that this hotel does not shine in puddings and sweets, and Charley has not been ashamed to grumble beyond the bounds of good manners. I heard some laughing and joking going on between the girls and the pupils, Metelill with her ‘Oh no! You won’t! Nonsense!’ in just that tone which means ‘I wish, I would, but I cannot bid you,’—the tone I do not like to hear in a maiden of any degree.

And behold three of those foolish lads have brought her gilt and painted boxes of bon-bons, over which there was a prodigious giggling and semi-refusing and bantering among the young folks, worrying Emily and me excessively, though we knew it would not do to interfere.

There is a sea-fog this evening unfavourable to the usual promenades, and we elders, including the


tutor, were sitting with my mother, when, in her whirlwind fashion, in burst Jane, dragging her little sister Chattie with her, and breathlessly exclaiming, 'Father, father, come and help! They are gambling, and I can't get Meg away!'

When the nervous ones had been convinced that no one had been caught by the tide or fallen off the rocks, Jane explained that Metelill had given one box of bon-bons to the children, who were to be served with one apiece all round every day. And the others were put up by Metelill to serve as prizes in the 'racing game,' which some one had routed out, left behind in the lodging, and which was now spread on the dining-table, with all the young people playing in high glee, and with immense noise.

'Betting too!' said Jane in horror. 'Mr. Elwood betted three chocolate creams upon Charley, and Pica took it! Father! Come and call Meg away.'

She spoke exactly as if she were summoning him to snatch her sister from *rouge et noir* at Monaco; and her face was indescribable when her aunt Edith set us all off laughing by saying, 'Fearful depravity, my dear.'

'Won't you come, father?' continued Jane; 'Mr. Methuen, won't you come and stop those young men?'



Mr. Methuen smiled a little and looked at Horace, who said—

‘Hush, Janie; these are not things in which to interfere.’

‘Then,’ quoth Jane sententiously, ‘I am not astonished at the dissipation of the university.’


And away she flounced in tears of wrath. Her mother went after her, and we laughed a little, it was impossible to help it, at the bathos of the chocolate creams; but, as Mr. Methuen said, she was really right, the amusement was undesirable, as savouring of evil. Edith, to my vexation, saw no harm in it; but Horace said very decidedly he hoped it would not happen again; and Margaret presently returned, saying she hoped that she had pacified Jane, and shown her that to descend as if there were an uproar in the school would only do much more harm than was likely to happen in that one evening; and she said to me afterwards, ‘I see what has been wanting in our training. We have let children’s loyalty run into intolerance and rudeness.’ But Meg was quite innocent of there being any harm in it, and only needed reproof for being too much charmed by the pleasure for once to obey her dictatorial sister.

13, *ten* A.M.—Horace has had it out with sundry

of the young ladies, so as to prevent any more betting. Several had regretted it. 'Only they did so want to get rid of the bon-bons! And Jane did make such an uproar.' After all, nobody did really bet but Charley and the young Elwood, and Pica only that once. Jane candidly owns that a little gentleness would have made a difference.

Again I see this obtuseness to courtesy towards strangers. Our despised church has become popular, and so many of the young folks choose to accompany us that they overflowed into the free seats in the aisle, where I had a full view of them from above. These benches are long, and I was sorry to see the girls planting themselves fast at the outer end, and making themselves square, so as to hinder any one else from getting in, till the verger came and spoke to them, when Charley giggled offensively; and even then they did not make room, but forced the people to squeeze past. Isa could not help herself, not being the outermost; but she was much distressed, and does not shelter herself under Charley's plea that it was so hot that the verger should have been indicted for cruelty to animals. Certainly they all did come home very hot from walking back with the pupils.

Pica and Avice were not among them, having




joined the Druces in going to Hollyford, where Horace preached this morning. Their gray serges and sailor hats were, as they said, 'not adapted to the town congregation.'

'It is the congregation you dress for?' said their uncle dryly, whereupon Pica upbraided him with inconsistency in telling his poor people not to use the excuse of 'no clothes,' and that the heart, not the dress, is regarded. He said it was true, but that he should still advocate the poor man's coming in his cleanest and best. 'There are manners towards God as well as towards man,' he said.

I was too much tired by the heat to go to church again this evening, and am sitting with my mother, who is dozing. Where the young people are I do not know exactly, but I am afraid I hear Charley's shrill laugh on the beach.


14.—Who do you think has found us out? Our dear old Governor-General, 'in all his laurels,' as enthusiastic little Avice was heard saying, which made Freddy stare hard and vainly in search of them. He is staying at Hollybridge Park, and seeing our name in the S. Clements' list of visitors, he made Lady Hollybridge drive him over to call, and was much disappointed to find that you could not be here



during his visit. He was as kind and warm-hearted as ever, and paid our dear mother such compliments on her son, that we tell her the bows on her cap are starting upright with pride.

Lady Hollybridge already knew Edith. She made herself very pleasant, and insisted on our coming *en masse* to a great garden party which they are giving to-morrow. Hollybridge is the S. Clements' lion, with splendid grounds and gardens, and some fine old pictures, so it is a fine chance for the young people; and we are going to hire one of the large excursion waggonettes, which will hold all who have age, dress, and will for gaieties. The pupils, as Mr. Methuen is a friend of the Hollybridge people, will attend us as outriders on their bicycles. I am rather delighted at thus catching out the young ladies who did not think it worth while to bring a Sunday bonnet. They have all rushed into S. Clements to furbish themselves for the occasion, and we are left to the company of the small Druces. Neither Margaret nor Emily chooses to go, and will keep my mother company.

I ventured on administering a sovereign apiece to Isa and Jane Druce. The first blushed and owned that it was very welcome, as her wardrobe had never recovered a great thunderstorm at Oxford. Jane's




awkwardness made her seem as if it were an offence on my part, but her mother tells me it made her very happy. Her father says that she tells him he was hard on Avice, a great favourite of his, and that I must ask Jane to explain, for it is beyond him. It is all right about the Oxford girl. I have engaged her, and she goes home to-morrow to prepare herself. This afternoon she is delighted to assist her young ladies in their preparations. I liked her much in the private interview. I was rather surprised to find that it was 'Miss Avice,' of whom she spoke with the greatest fervour, as having first made friends with her, and then having constantly lent her books and read to her in her illness.

15.—S. Swithun is evidently going to be merciful to us to-day, and the damsels have been indefatigable—all, that is to say, but the two Londoners, who have lawn tennis dresses, and their mother's maid to turn them out complete. Isa brought home some tulle and white jessamine with which she is deftly freshening the pretty compromise between a bonnet and a hat which she wears on Sunday; also a charming parasol, with a china knob and a wreath of roses at the side. She hopes I shall not think her extravagant, but she had a little money of her own.

Jane Druce displays two pairs of gloves and two neckties for herself and her sister ; and after all Meg will not go ; she is so uncouth that her mother does not like her to go without her own supervision ; and she with true Bourne Parva self-appreciation and exclusiveness says—

‘I’m sure I don’t want to go among a lot of stupid people, who care for nothing but fine clothes and lawn tennis.’

There was a light till one o’clock last night in the room where Avice sleeps with Charley and the dog ; and I scarcely saw either of the Oxford sisters or Jane all this morning till dinner-time, when Pica appeared very appropriately to her name, turned out in an old black silk dress left behind by her mother, and adorned with white tulle in all sorts of folds, also a pretty white bonnet made up by Avice’s clever fingers, and adorned with some soft gray sea-birds’ feathers and white down. Isa and Metelill were very well got up and nice. Metelill looks charming, but I am afraid her bouquet is from one of those foolish pupils. She, as usual, has shared it with Isa, who has taken half to prevent her cousin being remarkable. And, after all, poor Avice is to be left behind. There was no time to make up things for two, and being in



mourning, she could not borrow, though Metelill would have been too happy to lend. She says she shall be very happy with the children, but I can't help thinking there was a tear in her eye when she ran to fetch her dress cloak for Jane, whom, by the bye, Avice has made wonderfully more like other people. Here is the waggonette, and I must finish to-morrow.

16.—We have had a successful day. The drive each way was a treat in itself, and the moon rising over the sea on our way home was a sight never to be forgotten. Hollybridge is charming in itself. Those grounds with their sea-board are unique, and I never saw such Spanish chestnuts in England. Then the gardens and the turf! One must have lived as long in foreign parts as we have to appreciate the perfect finish and well-tended look of such places. Your dear old chief does not quite agree. He says he wants space, and is oppressed with the sense of hedges and fences, except when he looks to the sea, and even there the rocks look polished off, and treated by landscape gardeners! He walked me about to see the show places, and look at the pictures, saying he had been so well lionised that he wanted some one to discharge his information upon. It was

great fun to hear him criticising the impossibilities of a battle-piece—Blenheim, I think—the anachronisms of the firearms and uniforms, and the want of discipline around Marlborough, who would never have won a battle at that rate. You know how his hawk's eye takes note of everything. He looked at Metelill and said, 'Uncommonly pretty girl that, and knows it,' but when I asked what he thought of Isabel's looks, he said, 'Pretty, yes; but are you sure she is quite aboveboard? There's something I don't like about her eyes.' I wish he had not said so. I know there is a kind of unfriendly feeling towards her among some of the girls, especially the Druces and Charley. I have heard Charley openly call her a humbug, but I have thought much of this was dislike to the softer manners, and perhaps jealousy of my notice, and the expression that the old lord noticed is often the consequence of living in an uncongenial home.

Of course my monopoly of the hero soon ended, and as I had no acquaintances there, and the young ones had been absorbed into games, or had fraternised with some one, I betook myself to explorations in company with Jane, who had likewise been left out. After we had wandered along a dazzling stand of calceolarias,

she said, 'Aunt Charlotte, papa says I ought to tell you something; I mean, why Avice could not come to-day, and why she has nothing to wear but her round hat. It is because she and Pica spent all they had in paying for that Maude Harris at the Convalescent Home. They had some kind of flimsy gauzy bonnets that were faded and utterly done for after Commemoration week; and as Uncle Martyn is always growling about ladies' luggage, they thought it would be a capital plan to go without all the time they are down here, till another quarter is due. Avice never thought of its not being right to go to Church such a figure, and now she finds that papa thinks the command to "have power on her head" really may apply to that sort of fashion, we are going to contrive something for Sunday, but it could not be done in time for to-day. Besides, she had no dress but a serge.'

'She preferred dressing her sister to dressing herself,' I answered; and Jane began assuring me that no one knew how unselfish that dear old Bird is. The little money she had, she added to Pica's small remnant, and thus enough had been provided to fit the elder sister out.

'I suppose,' I said, 'that Isa manages better, for

she does not seem to be reduced to the same extremities, though I suppose she has less allowance than her cousins.'

'She has exactly the same. I know it.' And Jane caught herself up, evidently checking something I might have thought ill-natured, which made me respond something intended to be moralising, but which was perhaps foolish, about good habits of economy, and how this disappointment, taken so good-humouredly, would be a lesson to Avice. 'A lesson? I should think so,' said Jane bluntly. 'A lesson not to lend her money to Isa'; and then, when I asked what she meant, she blurted out that all Isa's so-called share of the subscription for Maude Harris had been advanced by Avice—Pica had told her so, with comments on her sister's folly in lending what she well knew would never be repaid; and Avice could not deny it, only defending herself by saying, she could not sacrifice the girl. It was a very uncomfortable revelation, considering that Isa might have given her cousin my sovereign, but no doubt she did not think that proper, as I had meant it to be spent for this outing.

I will at least give her the benefit of the doubt, and I would not encourage Jane to say any more

about her. Indeed, the girl herself did not seem so desirous of dwelling on Isa as of doing justice to Avice, whom, she told me very truly, I did not know. 'She is always the one to give way and be put aside for Pie and Isa,' said Jane. And now I think over the time we have had together, I believe it has often been so. 'You are very fond of her,' I said; and Jane answered, 'I should *think* so! Why, she spent eight months with us once at Bourne Parva, just after the great row with Miss Hurlstone. Oh, didn't you know? They had a bad governess, who used to meet a lover—a German musician, I think he was—when they were out walking, and bullied Avice because she was honest. When it all came to light, Pica came out and Isa was sent to school, but Avice had got into a low state of health, and they said Oxford was not good for her, so she came to us. And papa prepared her for Confirmation, and she did everything with us, and she really is just like one of ourselves,' said Jane, as the highest praise imaginable, though any one who contrasted poor Jane's stiff *pique* (Miss Dadsworth's turn-out) with the grace even of the gray serge, might not think it a compliment. Jane was just beginning to tell me that Avice always wrote to her to lay before her father the difficulties

about right and wrong faith and practice that their way of life and habits of society bring before the poor child, when Isa descended upon us with 'Oh! Aunt Charlotte, I could not think what had become of you, when I saw the great man without you.'

I begin to wonder whether she is really so very fond of me, or whether she does not like to see me with one of the others.

However, I shall be able to take Jane's hint, and cultivate Avice, for, as my mother did not come yesterday, Lady Hollybridge has most kindly insisted on her going over to-day. The carriage is taking some one to the station, and is to call for her and me to bring us to luncheon, the kind people promising likewise to send us back. So I asked whether I might bring a niece who had not been able to come yesterday, and as the young people had, as usual, become enamoured of Metelill, they begged for her likewise. Avice looks very well in the dress she made up for Pica, and being sisters and in mourning, the identity will only be natural. She is very much pleased and very grateful, and declares that she shall see everything she cares about much more pleasantly than in the larger party, and perhaps 'really hear the hero talk.' And Uncle Horace says, 'True, you

Bird, you are not like some young folk, who had rather hear themselves talk than Socrates and S. Ambrose both at once.' 'Oh!' said saucy Pica, 'now we know what Uncle Horace thinks of his own conversations with father!' By the bye, Martyn and Mary come home to-morrow, and I am very glad of it, for those evening diversions on the beach go on in full force, and though there is nothing tangible, except Charley's smoke, to object to, and it is the present way of young people, there is something unsatisfactory in it. Edith does not seem to mind what her daughters do. Margaret has no occasion to be uneasy about Jane, who always stays with the little ones while the maids are at supper, and generally takes with her the devoted Avice, who has some delicacy of throat forbidding these evening excursions. Meg gets more boisterous and noisy every day, Uchtred being her chief companion; but as she is merely a tomboy, I believe her parents think it inexpedient to give her hints that might only put fancies in her head. So they have only prohibited learning to smoke, staying out later than nine o'clock, and shrieking louder than a steam whistle!

17.—Yesterday was a great success. Avice was silent at first, but Metelill drew her out, and she had

become quite at her ease before we arrived. You would have been enchanted to see how much was made of our dear mother. Lord Hollybridge came out himself to give her his arm up the stone steps and across the slippery hall. The good old chief talked to her by the hour about you, and Avice's eyes shone all the time. After luncheon our kind hostess arranged that dear mother should have half an hour's perfect rest, in a charming little room fitted like a tent, and then had a low chair with two little fairy ponies in it to drive her about the gardens, while I walked with the two gentlemen and saw things much better than in the former hurly-burly, though that was a beautiful spectacle in its way. Avice, who has seen scores of *fêtes* in college grounds, much preferred the scenery, etc., in their natural state to a crowd of strangers. The young people took possession of the two girls, and when we all met for the five o'clock tea, before going home, Lady Georgina eagerly told her father that Miss Fulford had made out the subject of 'that picture.' It was a very beautiful Pre-Raphaelite, of a lady gathering flowers in a meadow, and another in contemplation, while a mysterious shape was at the back ; the ladies stiff-limbed but lovely faced, and the flowers—irises,


anemones, violets, and even the grass-blossom, done with botanical accuracy. A friend of Lord Hollybridge had picked it up for him in some obscure place in Northern Italy, and had not yet submitted it to an expert. Avice, it appeared, had recognised it as representing Leah and Rachel, as Action and Contemplation in the last books of Dante's *Purgatorio*, with the mystic griffin car in the distance. Our hosts were very much delighted; we all repaired to the picture, where she very quietly and modestly pointed out the details. A Dante was hunted up, but Lady Hollybridge and I were the only elders who knew any Italian, and when the catalogue was brought, Avice knew all the names of the translators, but as none were to be found, Lord Hollybridge asked if she would make him understand the passage, which she did, blushing a little, but rendering it in very good fluent English, so that he thanked her, and complimented her so much that she was obliged to answer that she had got it up when they were hearing some lectures on Dante; and besides it was mentioned by Ruskin; whereupon she was also made to find the reference, and mark both it and Dante.

‘I like that girl,’ said the old Governor-General;

'she is intelligent and modest both. There is something fine about the shape of her head.'

When we went home, Metelill was as proud and delighted as possible at what she called the Bird's triumph; but Avice did not seem at all elated, but to take her knowledge as a mere outcome of her ordinary Oxford life, where allusions, especially Ruskinian and Dantesque, came naturally. And then, as grandmamma went to sleep in her corner, the two girls and I fell into a conversation on that whole question of Action and Contemplation. At least Metelill asked the explanation, but I doubt whether she listened much while Avice and I talked out the matter, and I felt myself a girl again, holding the old interminable talks with the first dear Avice, before you made her my sister for those two happy years, and—— Well, it is no use paining you and myself with going back to those days, though there was something in the earnest thoughtfulness and depth of her young namesake and godchild that carried me back to the choicest day of companionship before you came on the scene. And to think what a jewel I have missed all this time!

18.—I am deeply grieved, and am almost ashamed to write what I have to tell you. I had been out to



see my mother with Margaret and Emily settle in their favourite resort on the beach, and was coming in to write my letters, when, in the sitting-room, which has open French windows down to the ground, I heard an angry voice—

‘I tell you it was no joke. It’s no use saying so,’ and I beheld Charley and Isa in the midst of a violent quarrel. ‘I’ve looked on at plenty of your dodges, sucking up to Aunt Charlotte to get taken out with her; but when it comes to playing spiteful tricks on my sister I will speak out.’

By this time I was on the window-step, checking Charley’s very improper tone, and asking what was the matter. Isa sprang to me, declaring that it was all Charley’s absurd suspicion and misconstruction. At last, amid hot words on both sides, I found that Charley had just found, shut into a small album which Metelill keeps upon the drawing-room table, a newly taken photograph of young Horne, one of the pupils, with a foolish devoted inscription upon the envelope, directed to Miss Fulford.

Isa protested that she had only popped it in to keep it safe until she could return it. Charley broke out. ‘As if I did not know better than that! Didn’t you make him give you that parasol and promise

him your photo? Ay, and give it him in return? You thought he would keep your secret, I suppose, but he tells everything, like a donkey as he is, to Bertie Elwood, and Bertie and I have such fun over him. And now, because you are jealous of poor Metelill, and think Aunt Charlotte may take a fancy to you instead of her, you are sticking his photo into her book just to do her harm with the aunts. I'm not strait-laced. I wouldn't mind having the photos of a hundred and fifty young men, only they would be horrid guys and all just alike; but Aunt Charlotte is—is—well—a regular old maid about it, and you knew she would mind it, and so you did it on purpose to upset Metelill's chances.'

Isa clung to me in floods of tears, desiring me not to believe anything so cruel and false. Every one always was so hard upon her, she said, and she had only put the thing inadvertently there, to get it out of sight, into the first book she saw, but unfortunately she did not know I had heard her trying to pass it off to Charley as a jest. However, as there was no proof there, I asked about the parasol. While the shopping was going on, she and young Horne had been in another street, and this was the consequence!

I was perfectly confounded. Receive presents

from young men! It seemed to me quite impossible. 'Oh, Isa thinks nothing of that!' said Charley. 'Ask her where she got those bangles, and that bouquet which she told you was half Metelill's. You think me awful, I know, Aunt Charlotte, but I do draw a line, though I would never have said one word about it if she had not played this nasty trick on Metelill.' Isa would have begun some imploring excuse, but our two gentlemen were seen coming up towards the window, and she fled, gasping out an entreaty that I would not tell Uncle Martyn.

Nor did I then and there, for I needed to understand the matter and look into it, so I told Martyn and Horace not to wait for me, and heard Charley's story more coolly. I had thought that Mr. Horne was Metelill's friend. 'So he was at first,' Charley said, 'but he is an uncommon goose, and Isa is no end of a hand at doing the pathetic poverty-stricken orphan! That's the way she gets so many presents!' Then she explained, in her select slang, that young Horne's love affairs were the great amusement of his fellow-pupils, and that she, being sure that the parasol was no present from me, as Isa had given the cousins to understand, had set Bertie Elwood to extract the truth by teasing his friend. 'But I


never meant to have told,' said Charley, 'if you had not come in upon us, when I was in the midst of such a wax that I did not know what I was saying'; and on my demanding what she meant by the elegant expression she had used about Isa and me, she explained that it was the schoolboy's word for currying favour. Every one but we stupid elders perceived the game, nay, even the Druces, living in full confidence with their children, knew what was going on. I have never spoken, but somehow people must read through one's brains, for there was a general conviction that I was going to choose a niece to accompany us. I wonder if you, my wise brother, let out anything to Edith. It is what men always do, they bind women to silence and then disclose the secret themselves, and say, 'Nothing is safe with these women.'

Any way, these girls have been generous, or else true to their *esprit de corps*, I do not know which to call it; for though they looked on at Isa's manoeuvres and my blindness with indignant contempt, they never attempted to interfere. Jane Druce was seized with a fit of passionate wrath and pity for me, but her father withheld her from disclosures, assuring her that I should probably find out the girl's true

disposition, and that it would be wrong to deprive Isa of a chance of coming under a fresh influence.

Poor girl, she must be very clever, for she kept up her constant wooing of me while she also coquetted with Mr. Horne, being really, as her contemporaries declare, a much worse flirt than Metelill, but the temptation of the parasol threw her off her guard, and she was very jealous of my taking out Metelill and Avice. I see now that it has been her effort to keep the others away from me. This spiteful trick, if it be true that she meant it, seems to have been done on Metelill, as being supposed to be her only real rival. Avice always yields to her, and besides, is too inoffensive to afford her any such opportunity.

When I talked to Mary, she said, 'Oh yes, I always knew she was a horrid little treacherous puss. Nature began it, and that governess worked on a ready soil. We sent her to school, and hoped she was cured, but I have long seen that it has only shown her how to be more plausible. But what can one do? One could not turn out an orphan, and I did not see that she was doing our own girls any harm. I'm sure I gave her every chance of marrying, for there was nothing I wished for so much, and I never told Martyn of her little manœuvres, knowing



he would not stand them ; and now what he will do, I can't think, unless you and Edward will take her off our hands. I believe you might do her good. She is an unfathomable mixture of sham and earnest, and she really likes you, and thinks much of you, as having a certain prestige, and being a woman of the world' (fancy that). 'Besides, she is really religious in a sort of a way ; much good you'll say it does her, but, as you know, there's a certain sort of devotion which makes no difference to people's conduct.'

It seems to be the general desire of the family that we should take this unfortunate Isabel off their hands. Shall we? Cruelly as I have been disappointed in the girl, I can't help liking her ; she is obliging, pleasant, ladylike in manners, very affectionate, and I can't help thinking that with the respect and fear for you she would feel she might be restrained, and that we could be the saving of her, though at the same time I know that my having been so egregiously deceived may be a sign that I am not fit to deal with her. I leave it to your decision altogether, and will say no more till I hear. Metelill is a charming girl, and I fancy you prefer her, and that her mother knows it, and would send

her for at least a winter ; but she gets so entirely off her balance whenever a young man of any sort comes near, that I should not like to take charge of her. It might be good for the worthy Jane, but as she would take a great deal of toning down and licking into shape, and as she would despise it all, refer everything to the Bourne Parva standard, and pine for home and village school, I don't think she need be considered, especially as I am sure she would not go, and could not be spared. Pica would absorb herself in languages and antiquities, and maintain the rights of women by insisting on having full time to study her protoplasms, snubbing and deriding all the officers who did not talk like Oxford dons. Probably the R. E. would be the only people she would think fit to speak to. Avise is the one to whom I feel the most drawn. She is thoroughly thoughtful, and her religion is not of the uninfluential kind Mary describes. Those distresses and perplexities which poor Isa affected were chiefly borrowed from her genuine ones ; but she has obtained the high cultivation and intelligence that her Oxford life can give in full measure, and without conceit or pretension, and it is her unselfish, yielding spirit that has prevented me from knowing her sooner, though

when not suppressed she can be thoroughly agreeable, and take her part in society with something of her mother's brilliancy. I think, too, that she would be spared, as Oxford does not agree with her, and a southern winter or two would be very good for her. Besides, the others might come and see her in vacation time. Could we not take both her and Isabel at least for the first winter?

19.—A stormy wet day, the first we have had. Poor Isa has made an attempt at explanation and apology, but lost herself in a mist of words and tears. I suppose I was severe, for she shrinks from me, and clings to Avice, who has stood her friend in many a storm before, and, as Jane indignantly tells me, persists in believing that she is really sorry and wishes to be good. She is very attentive and obliging, and my dear mother, who is in happy ignorance of all this uproar, really likes her the best of all the girls.


21.—We have had a great alarm. Last evening we went to the parish church; Horace Druce had been asked to preach, and the rain, which had fallen all the morning, cleared off just in time for the walk. Emily, Margaret, two of her children, and I sat in the gallery, and Avice and Isa in the free seats below. Avice had been kept at home by the rain in the

morning, but had begged leave to go later. Darkness came on just as the first hymn was given out, and the verger went round with his long wand lighting the gas. In the gallery we saw plainly how, at the east end, something went wrong with his match, one which he thought had failed, and threw aside. It fell on a strip of straw matting in the aisle, which, being very dry, caught fire and blazed up for a few seconds before it was trampled out. Some foolish person, however, set the cry of 'Fire!' going, and you know what that is in a crowded church. The vicar, in his high old-fashioned desk with a back to it, could not see. Horace in a chair, in the narrow, shallow sanctuary, did see that it was nothing, but between the cries of 'Fire!' and the dying peal of the organ, could not make his voice heard. All he could do was to get to the rear of the crowd, together with the other few who had seen the real state of things, and turn back all those whom they could, getting them out through the vestry. But the main body were quite out of their reach, and everybody tried to rush scrambling into the narrow centre aisle, choking up the door, which was a complicated trap meant to keep out draughts. We in the gallery tried vainly to assure them that the only danger was in the crowd,

and the clergyman in his desk, sure that was the chief peril, at any rate, went on waving and calling to them to wait ; but the cries and shrieks drowned everything, and there was a most terrible time, as some 600 people jammed themselves in that narrow space, fighting, struggling, fainting.


You may suppose how we watched our girls. They had let themselves be thrust up to the end of the seat by later comers : Avice the innermost. We saw them look up to us, with white faces. To our joy, Avice seemed to understand our signs and to try to withhold Isa, but she was too wild with fright not to try to push on to the end of the pew. Avice held her dress, and kept her back. Then, as the crowd swayed, the two girls stood on the seat, and presently I saw Avice bend down, and take from some one's arms a little child, which she seated on the edge of the pew, holding it in her arms, and soothing it. I don't know how long it all lasted, Horace says it was not ten minutes before he had got men and tools to break down the obstruction at the door, and pull out the crowded, crushed people, but to us it seemed hours. They were getting calmer too in the rear, for many had followed the lead through the vestry door, and others had found out that there was no fire at all.

Wonderful to tell, no one was killed. There were some broken arms, three I think, and some bad bruises. Many people were fainting, and much hurt by the horrible heat and crush, but when at last the way was free, we saw Horace come into the church, looking about in great anxiety for the two girls, whom he had failed to find in the trampled multitude. Then Avice came up to him, with the child in her arms, and Isa followed, quite safe! How thankful we all were! Avice says she remembered at once that she had been told of the American fireman's orders to his little girl always to keep still in such an alarm, for the crowd was a worse peril than the fire. By the time we had come down the stairs and joined them, the child's father had come for it in great anxiety, for its sister had been trampled down fainting, and had just only revived enough to miss it! I shall never forget what it was to see people sucked down in that surging mass, and the thankful thrill of seeing our girls standing there quietly with the child between them, its little fair head on Avice's breast. We went home quietly and thankfully. Horace took Avice to the hotel that he might explain all to her parents, and let them know how well she had behaved. Isabel was shaken and tearful, and her voice



sounded weak and nervous as she bade her cousin good-night and embraced her with much agitation. So I went to her room to see whether she needed any doctoring, but I found Metelill soothing her nicely, so I only kissed her (as I had not done these two nights). 'Ah, dear aunt, you forgive me!' she said. The tone threw me back, as if she were making capital of her adventure, and I said, 'You have not offended *me*.' 'Ah! you are still angry, and yet you *do* love me still a little,' she said, not letting me go. 'The more love, the more grief for your having done wrong,' I said; and she returned, 'Ah! if I always had you.' That chilled me, and I went away. She does not know the difference between pardon and remission of consequences. One must have something of the spirit of the fifty-first Psalm before that perception comes. Poor dear child, how one longs for power to breathe into her some such penitence!

Avise is quite knocked up to-day, and her mother has kept her in bed, where she is very happy with her Jane. I have been to see her, and she has been thanking me for having suggested the making way for fresh comers in a pew. Otherwise, she says, she could not have withstood the rush.



SIR EDWARD FULFORD *to* MISS FULFORD

22d July.

MY DEAR CHARLOTTE,—I decidedly object to the company of a young lady with such a genius for intrigue as Isabel Fulford seems to possess. If we had only ourselves to consider, no doubt it would be well for you to take her in hand, but in the sort of house ours will be, there must be no one we cannot depend upon in our own family.

I suppose I am guilty of having betrayed my thoughts to Edith. I had certainly wished for Metelill. She is an engaging creature, and I am sorry you take so adverse a view of her demeanour; but I promised to abide by your judgment and I will not question it. We will ask Arthur and Edith to bring her to visit us, and then perhaps you may be better satisfied with her.

The learned young lady is out of the question, and as Avice is my dear wife's godchild as well as mine, I am very glad she has deserved that your choice should fall upon her. It seems as if you would find in her just the companionship you wish, and if her health needs the southern climate, it is well to give

her the opportunity. You had better propose the scheme at once, and provide what she will need for an outfit. The last touches might be given at Paris. I hope to get time to run down to New Cove next week, and if you and the niece can be ready to start by the middle of August, we will take Switzerland by the way, and arrive at Malta by the end of September.

I shall be curious to hear the result of your throwing the handkerchief.—Your affectionate brother,
E. F.

MISS FULFORD to SIR EDWARD FULFORD

July 24.—I threw the handkerchief by asking Martyn and Mary to spare their daughter. Tears came into Mary's eyes, the first I ever saw there, and she tried in vain to say something ridiculous. Martyn walked to the window and said huskily, 'Dr. A—— said it would confirm her health to spend a few winters in the South. Thank you, Charlotte!' They did not doubt a moment, but Martyn feels the parting more than I ever thought he would, and Pica and Uchtred go about howling and bewailing, and declaring that they never shall know where to find anything again.

Avice herself is much more sorrowful than glad, though she is too courteous and grateful not to show herself gracious to me. She did entreat me to take Isa instead, so earnestly that I was obliged to read her your decided objections. It was a blow to her at first, but she is rapidly consoling herself over the wonderful commissions she accepts. She is to observe Mediterranean zoophytes, and send them home on glass slides for the family benefit. She is to send her father photographs and drawings to illustrate his lectures, and Jane has begged for a pebble or rock from S. Paul's Bay, to show to her class at school. Indeed, I believe Avice is to write a special journal, to be published in the *Bourne Parva Parish Magazine*; Charley begs for a sea-horse, and Freddy has been instructed by one of the pupils to bargain for nothing less than the Colossus of Rhodes; Metelill is quite as cordial in her rejoicing, and Edith owns that, now it has come to the point, she is very glad to keep her daughter.

And Isa? Well, she is mortified, poor child. I think she must have cried bitterly over the disappointment, for she looked very wretched when we met at dinner.

Meanwhile, Martyn had a walk with Emily, who

found that he was very sorry not to be relieved from Isabel, though he knew you were quite right not to take her. He thought Oxford not a good place for such a girl, and the absence of the trustworthy Avice would make things worse. Then Emily proposed to take Isabel back to the Birchwood with her. Grand-mamma really likes the girl, who is kind and attentive. There are no young people to whom she could do harm, Emily can look after her, and will be glad of help and companionship. The whole family council agreed that it will be a really charitable work, and that if any one can do her good, it will be the mother and Aunt Emily.

Isa has acquiesced with an overflow of gratitude and affection to them for taking pity on her. It sounds a little fulsome, but I believe some of it is genuine. She is really glad that some one wishes for her, and I can quite believe that she will lose in Avice all that made life congenial to her under Mary's brisk uncompromising rule. If she can only learn to be true—true to herself and to others—she will yet be a woman to love and esteem, and at Birchwood they will do their best to show that religious sentiment must be connected with Truth.

And so ends my study of the manners of my nieces, convincing me the more that as the manners are, so is the man or woman. The heart, or rather the soul, forms the manners, and they *are* the man.

C. F.

COME TO HER KINGDOM

‘TAKE care! Oh, take care!’

Whisk, swish, click, click, through the little crowd at Stokesley on a fine April afternoon, of jocund children just let loose from school, and mothers emerging from their meeting, collecting their progeny after the fashion of old ewes with their lambs; Susan Merrifield in a huge, carefully preserved brown mushroom hat, with a big basket under one arm, and a roll of calico under the other; her sister Elizabeth with a book in one hand, and a packet of ambulance illustrations; the Vicar, Mr. Doyle, and his sister likewise loaded, talking to them about the farmer's wedding of the morning, for which the bells had been ringing fitfully all day, and had just burst out again. Such was the scene, through which, like a flash, spun a tricycle, from which a tiny curly-haired being in knickerbockers was barely saved by his mother's seizing him by one arm.

‘A tricycle!’ exclaimed the Vicar.

‘A woman! Oh!’ cried Susan in horror, ‘and she’s stopping—at the Gap. Oh!’

‘My dear Susie, you must have seen ladies on tricycles before,’ whispered her sister.

‘No, indeed, I am thankful to say I have not! If it should be Miss Arthuret!’ said Susan, with inexpressible tones in her voice.

‘She was bowing right and left,’ said the Vicar, a little maliciously; ‘depend upon it, she thought this was a welcome from the rural population.’

‘Hark! here’s something coming.’


The Bonchamp fly came rattling up, loaded with luggage, and with a quiet lady in black seated in it, which stopped at the same gate.

‘The obedient mother, no doubt,’ said Elizabeth. ‘She looks like a lady.’

There had been a good deal of excitement at Stokesley about the property known by the pleasing name of the Gap. An old gentleman had lived there for many years, always in a secluded state, and latterly imbecile, and on his death in the previous year no one had for some time appeared as heir; but it became known that the inheritrix was a young lady, a great-niece, living with a widowed mother in

one of the large manufacturing towns in the north of England. Her father had been a clergyman and had died when she was an infant. That was all that was known, and as the house had become almost uninhabitable, the necessary repairs had prevented the heiress from taking possession all this time. It was not a very large inheritance, only comprising a small farm, the substantial village shop, four or five cottages, and a moderate-sized house and grounds, where the neglected trees had grown to strange irregular proportions, equally with the income, which, owing to the outgoings being small, had increased to about £800 or £900 a year, and of course it was a subject of much anxiety with Admiral Merrifield's family to know what sort of people the newcomers would prove.

Of the large family only the two eldest daughters were at home; Susan, now nearly forty, had never left it, but had been the daughter-of-all-work at home and lady-of-all-work to the parish ever since she had emerged from the schoolroom; her apricot complexion showing hardly any change, and such as there was never perceived by her parents. The Admiral, still a light, wiry, hale man, as active as ever, with his hands full of county, parish, and farming business;




and his wife a thoroughly homely, yet ingrain lady, an invalid for many years, but getting into that health which is *la jeunesse de la vieillesse*.

Elizabeth had, from twenty-five to thirty-two, been spared from home by her father to take care of his stepmother in London, where she had beguiled her time with a certain amount of authorship under a *nom de plume*, and had been introduced to some choice society both through her literary abilities and her family connections.

Four years previous the old lady had died, leaving her a legacy, which, together with her gains, would have enabled her to keep such a home in town as to remain in touch with the world to which she had been introduced ; but she had never lost her Stokesley heart enough for the temptation to outweigh the disappointment she would have caused at home, and the satisfaction and rest of being among her own people. So she only went up for an occasional visit, and had become the brightness of the house, and Susan's beloved partner in all her works.


Her father, who understood better than did her mother and sister what she had given up, had insisted on her having a sitting-room to herself, which she embellished with the personal possessions she had



accumulated, and where she pursued her own avocations in the forenoon, often indeed interrupted, but never showing, and not often feeling, that it was to her hindrance, and indeed the family looked on her work sufficiently as a profession, not only to acquiesce, but to have a certain complacency in it, though it was a kind of transparent fiction that MESA was an anagram of her initials and that of Stokesley. Her mother at any rate believed that none of the neighbours guessed at any such thing.

Stokesley was a good deal out of the world, five miles from the station at Bonchamp, over hilly, stony roads, so that the cyclist movement had barely reached it; the neighbourhood was sparse, and Mrs. Merrifield's health had not been conducive to visiting, any more than was her inclination, so that there was a little agitation about first calls.

The newcomers appeared at church on Sunday at all the services. A bright-faced girl of one-and-twenty, with little black eyes like coals of fire, a tight ulster, like a riding habit, and a small billycock hat, rather dismayed those who still held that bonnets ought to be the Sunday gear of all beyond childhood; but the mother, in rich black silk, was unexceptionable.



Refusing to be marshalled up the aisle to the seat which persistent tradition assigned to the Gap in the aristocratic quarter, daughter and mother (it was impossible not thus to call them) sat themselves down on the first vacant place, close to a surviving white smock-frock, and blind to the bewildered glances of his much-bent friend in velveteen, who, hobbling in next after, found himself displaced and separated alike from his well-thumbed prayer and hymn book and the companion who found the places for him.

‘It ain’t fitty like,’ said the old man confidentially to Susan, ‘nor the ladies wouldn’t like it when we comes in with our old coats all of a muck with wet.’

‘The principle is right,’ said Bessie, when this was repeated to her; ‘but practice ought to wait till native manners and customs are learnt.’

The two sisters offered to save their mother the first visit—leave her card, or make her excuses; but Mrs. Merrifield held that a card thus left savoured of deceit, and that the deed must be womanfully done in person. But she would not wait till the horses could be spared, saying that for near village neighbours it was more friendly to go down in her

donkey-chair ; and so she did, Bessie driving her, and the Admiral walking with them.

The Gap had, ever since Bessie could remember, been absolutely shrouded in trees, its encircling wall hidden in ivy bushes, over which laburnums, lilacs, pink thorns, and horse chestnuts towered ; and the drive from the seldom-opened gate was almost obstructed by the sweeping arms of laurels and larches.

It was obstructed now, but by these same limbs lying amputated ; and ‘chop, chop!’ was heard in the distance.

‘Oh, the *Arbutus*!’ sighed Bessie.

‘Clearing was much needed,’ said her father, with a man’s propensity for the axe.

The donkey, however, thought it uncanny, ‘upon the pivot of his skull, turned round his long left ear,’ and planted his feet firmly. Mrs. Merrifield, deprecating the struggle by which her husband would on such occasions enforce discipline, begged to get out ; and while this was going on, the ulstered young lady, with a small axe in hand, came, as it were, to the rescue, and, while the donkey was committed to a small boy, explained hastily, ‘So overgrown, there is nothing to be done but to let in light and air.

My mother is at home,' she added; 'she will be happy to see you,' and, conducting them in with complete self-possession—rather, as it occurred to Bessie, as the Queen might have led the way to the Duchess of Kent, though there was a perfect simplicity and evident enjoyment about her that was very prepossessing, and took off the edge of the sense of conceit. Besides, the palace was, to London eyes at least, so little to boast of, with the narrow little box of a wooden porch, the odd, one-sided vestibule, and the tiny anteroom with the worn carpet; but the drawing-room, in spite of George IV furniture, was really pretty, with French windows opening on a well-mown lawn, and fresh importations of knick-knacks, and vases of wild flowers, which made it look inhabited and pleasant. There was no one there, and the young lady proceeded to fetch her mother; and the unguarded voice was caught by Bessie's quick ears from the window.

'Here are Admiral and Mrs. Merrifield, and one daughter. Come along, little mammy! Worthy, homely old folks—just in your line.'

To Bessie's relief, she perceived that this was wholly unheard by her father and mother. And there was no withstanding the eager, happy, shy

looks of the mother, whose whole face betrayed that after many storms she had come into a haven of peace, and that she was proud to owe it to her daughter.

A few words showed that mother and daughter were absolutely enchanted with Stokesley, their own situation, and one another—the young lady evidently all the more because she perceived so much to be done.

‘Everything wants improving. It is so choked up,’ she said, ‘one wants to let in the light.’

‘There are a good many trees,’ said the Admiral, while Bessie suspected that she meant figuratively as well as literally; and as the damsel was evidently burning to be out at her clearing operations again, and had never parted with her axe, the Admiral offered to go with her and tell her about the trees, for, as he observed, she could hardly judge of those not yet out in leaf.

She accepted him, though Bessie shrewdly suspected that the advice would be little heeded, and, not fancying the wet grass and branches, nor the demolition of old friends, she did not follow the pair, but effaced herself, and listened with much interest to the two mothers, who sat on the sofa with their


heads together. Either Mrs. Merrifield was wonderful in inspiring confidence, or it was only too delightful to Mrs. Arthuret to find a listener of her own standing to whom to pour forth her full heart of thankfulness and delight in her daughter. 'Oh, it is too much!' occurred so often in her talk that, if it had not been said with liquid eyes, choking voice, and hands clasped in devout gratitude, it would have been tedious; but Mrs. Merrifield thoroughly went along with it, and was deeply touched.

The whole story, as it became known, partly in these confidences, partly afterwards, was this. The good lady, who had struck the family at first as a somewhat elderly mother for so young a daughter, had been for many years a governess, engaged all the time to a curate, who only obtained a small district incumbency in a town, after wear and tear, waiting and anxiety, had so exhausted him that the second winter brought on bronchitis, and he scarcely lived to see his little daughter, Arthurine. The mother had struggled on upon a pittance eked out with such music teaching as she could procure, with her little girl for her sole care, joy, and pride—a child who, as she declared, had never given her one moment's pang or uneasiness.

‘Poor mamma, could she say that of any one of her nine?’ thought Bessie; and Mrs. Merrifield made no such attempt.

Arthurine had brought home all prizes, all distinctions at the High School, but—here was the only disappointment of her life—a low fever had prevented her trying for a scholarship at Girton. In consideration, however, of her great abilities and high qualities, as well as out of the great kindness of the committee, she had been made an assistant to one of the class mistresses, and had worked on with her own studies, till the wonderful tidings came of the inheritance that had fallen to her quite unexpectedly; for since her husband’s death Mrs. Arthuret had known nothing of his family, and while he was alive there were too many between him and the succession for the chance to occur to him as possible. The relief and blessing were more than the good lady could utter. All things are comparative, and to one whose assured income had been £70 a year, £800 was unbounded wealth; to one who had spent her life in schoolrooms and lodgings, the Gap was a lordly demesne.

‘And what do you think was the first thing my sweet child said?’ added Mrs. Arthuret, with her



eyes glittering through tears. 'Mammy, you shall never hear the scales again, and you shall have the best Mocha coffee every day of your life.'

Bessie felt that after this she must like the sweet child, though sweetness did not seem to her the predominant feature in Arthurine.

After the pathos to which she had listened there was somewhat of a comedy to come, for the ladies had spent the autumn abroad, and had seen and enjoyed much. 'It was a perfect feast to see how Arthurine entered into it all,' said the mother. 'She was never at a loss, and explained it all to me. Besides, perhaps you have seen her article?'

'I beg your pardon.'

'Her article in the *Kensington*. It attracted a great deal of attention, and she has had many compliments.'

'Oh! the *Kensington Magazine*,' said Mrs. Merrifield, rather uneasily, for she was as anxious that Bessie should not be suspected of writing in the said periodical as the other mother was that Arthurine should have the fame of her contributions.

'Do you take it?' asked Mrs. Arthuret, 'for we should be very glad to lend it to you.'

A whole pile was on the table, and Mrs. Merri-

field looked at them with feeble thanks and an odd sort of conscious dread, though she could with perfect truth have denied either 'taking it' or reading it.

Bessie came to her relief. 'Thank you,' she said; 'we do; some of us have it. Is your daughter's article signed A. A., and doesn't it describe a boarding-house on the Italian lakes? I thought it very clever and amusing.'

Mrs. Arthuret's face lighted up. 'Oh yes, my dear,' slipped out in her delight. 'And do you know, it all came of her letter to one of the High School ladies, who is sister to the sub-editor, such a clever, superior girl! She read it to the headmistress and all, and they agreed that it was too good to be lost, and Arthurine copied it out and added to it, and he—Mr. Jarrett—said it was just what he wanted—so full of information and liveliness—and she is writing some more for him.'

Mrs. Merrifield was rather shocked, but she felt that she herself was in a glass house, was, in fact, keeping a literary daughter, so she only committed herself to, 'She is very young.'

'Only one-and-twenty,' returned Mrs. Arthuret triumphantly; 'but then she has had such advantages, and made such use of them. Everything seems

to come at once, though, perhaps, it is unthankful to say so. Of course, it is no object now, but I could not help thinking what it would have been to us to have discovered this talent of hers at the time when we could hardly make both ends meet.'

'She will find plenty of use for it,' said Mrs. Merrifield, who, as the wife of a country squire and the mother of nine children, did not find it too easy to make her ends meet upon a larger income.

'Oh yes! indeed she will, the generous child. She is full of plans for the regeneration of the village.'


Poor Mrs. Merrifield! this was quite too much for her. She thought it irreverent to apply the word in any save an ecclesiastical sense; nor did she at all desire to have the parish, which was considered to be admirably worked by the constituted authorities, 'regenerated,' whatever that might mean, by a young lady of one-and-twenty. She rose up and observed to her daughter that she saw papa out upon the lawn, and she thought it was time to go home.

Mrs. Arthuret came out with them, and found what Bessie could only regard as a scene of desolation. Though gentlemen, as a rule, have no mercy on trees, and ladies are equally inclined to cry, 'Woodman, spare that tree,' the rule was reversed,

for Miss Arthuret was cutting, and ordering cutting all round her ruthlessly with something of the pleasure of a child in breaking a new toy to prove that it is his own, scarcely listening when the Admiral told her what the trees were, and how beautiful in their season; while even as to the evergreens, she did not know a yew from a cedar, and declared that she must get rid of this horrid old laurustinus, while she lopped away at a Portugal laurel. Her one idea seemed to be that it was very unwholesome to live in a house surrounded with trees; and the united influence of the Merrifields, working on her mother by representing what would be the absence of shade in a few months' time, barely availed to save the life of the big cedar; while the great rhododendron, wont to present a mountain of shining leaves and pale purple blossoms every summer, was hewn down without remorse as an awful old laurel, and left a desolate brown patch in its stead.

'Is it an emblem,' thought Bessie, 'of what she would like to do to all of us poor old obstructions?'

After all, Mrs. Merrifield could not help liking the gentle mother, by force of sympathy; and the Admiral was somewhat fascinated by the freshness and impetuosity of the damsel, as elderly men are



wont to be with young girls who amuse them with what they are apt to view as an original form of the silliness common to the whole female world except their own wives, and perhaps their daughters; and Bessie was extremely amused, and held her peace, as she had been used to do in London. Susan was perhaps the most annoyed and indignant. She was presiding over seams and button-holes the next afternoon at school, when the mother and daughter walked in; and the whole troop started to their feet and curtsied.

‘Don’t make them stand! I hate adulation. Sit down, please. Where’s the master?’

‘In the boys’ school, ma’am,’ said the mistress, uncomfortably indicating the presence of Miss Merri-field, who felt herself obliged to come forward and shake hands.

‘Oh! so you have separate schools. Is not that a needless expense?’

‘It has always been so,’ returned Susan quietly.

‘Board? No? Well, no doubt you are right; but I suppose it is at a sacrifice of efficiency. Have you cookery classes?’

‘We have not apparatus, and the girls go out too early for it to be of much use.’

‘Ah, that’s a mistake. Drawing?’

‘The boys draw.’

‘I shall go and see them. Not the girls? They look orderly enough; but are they intelligent? Well, I shall look in and examine them on their special subjects, if they have any. I suppose not.’

‘Only class. Grammar and needlework.’

‘I see, the old routine. Quite the village school.’


‘It is very nice work,’ put in Mrs. Arthuret, who had been looking at it.

‘Oh yes, it always is when everything is sacrificed to it. Good-morning, I shall see more of you, Mrs.—— ahem.’

‘Please, ma’am, should I tell her that she is not a school manager?’ inquired the mistress, somewhat indignantly, when the two ladies had departed.

‘You had better ask the Vicar what to do,’ responded Susan.

The schoolmaster, on his side, seemed to have had so much advice and offers of assistance in lessons on history, geography, and physical science, that he had been obliged to refer her to the managers, and explain that till the next inspection he was bound to abide by the time-table.



‘Ah, well, I will be one of the managers another year.’

So she told the Vicar, who smiled, and said, ‘We must elect you.’

‘I am sure much ought to be done. It is mere waste to have two separate schools, when a master can bring the children on so much better in the higher subjects.’

‘Mrs. Merrifield and the rest of us are inclined to think that what stands highest of all with us is endangered by mixed schools,’ said Mr. Doyle.


‘Oh!’ Arthurine opened her eyes; ‘but education does all *that*.’

‘Education does, but knowledge is not wisdom. Susan Merrifield’s influence has done more for our young women than the best class teaching could do.’

‘Oh, but the Merrifields are all so *bornés* and homely; they stand in the way of all culture.’

‘Indeed,’ said the Vicar, who had in his pocket a very favourable review of MESA’s new historical essay.

‘Surely an old-fashioned squire and Lady Bountiful and their very narrow daughters should not be allowed to prevent improvement, pauperise the place, and keep it in its old grooves.’



‘Well, we shall see what you think by the time you have lived here long enough to be eligible for—what?’


‘School manager, guardian of the poor!’ cried Arthurine.

‘We shall see,’ repeated the Vicar. ‘Good-morning.’

He asked Bessie’s leave to disclose who MESA was.

‘Oh, don’t!’ she cried, ‘it would spoil the fun! Besides, mamma would not like it, which is a better reason.’

There were plenty of books, old and new, in Bessie’s room, magazines and reviews, but they did not come about the house much, unless any of the Rockstone cousins or the younger generation were staying there, or her brother David had come for a rest of mind and body. Between housekeeping, gardening, parish work, and pottering, Mrs. Merrifield and Susan never had time for reading, except that Susan thought it her duty to keep something improving in hand, which generally lasted her six weeks on a moderate average. The Admiral found quite reading enough in the newspapers, pamphlets and business publications; and their neighbours, the Greville family, were chiefly devoted to hunting and



lawn tennis, so that there was some reason in Mrs. Arthuret's lamentation to the Vicar that dear Arthurine did so miss intellectual society, such as she had been used to with the High School mistresses—two of whom had actually been at Girton!

‘Does she not get on with Bessie Merrifield?’ he asked.

‘Miss Bessie has a very sweet face; Arthurine did say she seemed well informed and more intelligent than her sister. Perhaps Arthurine might take her up. It would be such an advantage to the poor girl.’

‘Which?’ was on Mr. Doyle's tongue, but he restrained it, and only observed that Bessie had lived for a good many years in London.

‘So I understood,’ said Arthurine, ‘but with an old grandmother, and that is quite as bad as if it was in the country; but I will see about it. I might get up a debating society, or one for studying German.’

In the meantime Arthurine decided on improving and embellishing the parish with a drinking fountain, and meeting Bessie one afternoon in the village, she started the idea.

‘But,’ said Bessie, ‘there is a very good supply. Papa saw that good water was accessible to all the

houses in the village street ten years ago, and the outlying ones have wells, and there's the brook for the cattle.'

'I am sure every village should have a fountain and a trough, and I shall have it here instead of this dirty corner.'

'Can you get the ground?'

'Oh, any one would give ground for such a purpose! Whose is it?'


'Mr. Grice's, at Butter End.'

The next time Susan and Bessie encountered Arthurine, she began—

'Can you or Admiral Merrifield do nothing with that horrid old Grice! Never was any one so pig-headed and stupid.'

'What? He won't part with the land you want?'

'No; I wrote to him and got no answer. Then I wrote again, and I got a peaked-hand sort of note that his wife wrote, I should think. "Mr. Grice presented his compliments" (compliments indeed!), "and had no intention of parting with any part of Spragg's portion." Well, then I called to represent what a benefit it would be to the parish and his own cattle, and what do you think the old brute said?



—that “there was a great deal too much done for the parish already, and he wouldn’t have no hand in setting up the labourers, who were quite impudent enough already.” Well, I saw it was of no use to talk to an old wretch like that about social movements and equal rights, so I only put the question whether having pure water easily accessible would not tend to make them better behaved and less impudent as he called it, upon which he broke out into a tirade. “He didn’t hold with cold water and teetotal, not he. Why, it had come to *that*—that there was no such thing as getting a fair day’s work out of a labouring man with their temperance, and their lectures, and their schools, and their county councils and what not!” Really I had read of such people, but I hardly believed they still existed.’

‘Grice is very old, and the regular old sort of farmer,’ said Bessie.

‘But could not the Admiral persuade him or Mr. Doyle?’

‘Oh no,’ said Susan, ‘it would be of no use. He was just as bad about a playground for the boys, though it would have prevented their being troublesome elsewhere.’

‘Besides,’ added Bessie, ‘I am sure papa would say

that there is no necessity. He had the water analysed, and it is quite good, and plenty of it.'

'Well, I shall see what can be done.'

'She thinks us as bad as old Grice,' said Susan, as they saw her walking away in a determined manner.

The next thing that was heard was the Admiral coming in from the servants' hall, whither he had been summoned by 'Please, sir, James Hodd wishes to speak to you.'

'What is this friend of yours about, Bessie?'


'What friend, papa?'

'Why, this Miss Arthur—what d'ye call her?' said the Admiral (who on the whole was much more attracted by her than were his daughters). 'Here's a deputation from her tenant, James Hodd, with "Please, sir, I wants to know if 'tis allowed to turn folks out of their houses as they've paid rent for reg'lar with a week's notice, when they pays by the year."'

'You don't mean it!' exclaimed Mrs. Merrifield and Susan together.

'Poor old Mrs. West,' said the mother.

'And all the Tibbinses!' exclaimed Susan. 'She can't do it, can she, papa?'



‘Certainly not, without the proper notice, and so I told James, and that the notice she had sent down to him was so much waste-paper.’

‘So at least she has created a village Hampden,’ said Bessie, ‘though, depend upon it, she little supposes herself to be the petty tyrant.’

‘I must go and explain to her, I suppose, to-morrow morning,’ said the Admiral.

However, he had scarcely reached his own gate before the ulstered form was seen rushing up to him.

‘Oh! Admiral Merrifield, good-morning; I was coming to ask you——’

‘And I was coming to you.’

‘Oh! Admiral, is it really so—as that impudent man told me—that those horrid people can’t be got out of those awful tumbledown, unhealthy places for all that immense time?’

‘Surely he was not impudent to you? He was only asserting his right. The cottages were taken by the year, and you have no choice but to give six months’ notice. I hope he was not disrespectful.’

‘Well, no—I can’t say that he was, though I don’t care for those cap-in-hand ways of your people here. But at any rate, he says he won’t go—no, not any of

them, though I offered to pay them up to the end of the time, and now I must put off my beautiful plans. I was drawing them all yesterday morning—two model cottages on each side, and the drinking fountain in the middle. I brought them up to show you. Could you get the people to move out? I would promise them to return after the rebuilding.’

‘Very nice drawings. Yes—yes—very kind intentions.’

‘Then can’t you persuade them?’


‘But, my dear young lady, have you thought what is to become of them in the meantime?’

‘Why, live somewhere else! People in Smoke-land were always shifting about.’

‘Yes—those poor little town tenements are generally let on short terms and are numerous enough. But here—where are the vacant cottages for your four families? Hodd with his five children, Tibbins with eight or nine, Mrs. West and her widow daughter and three children, and the Porters with a bedridden father?’

‘They are dreadfully overcrowded. Is there really no place?’

‘Probably not nearer than those trumpery new tenements at Bonchamp. That would be eight miles



to be tramped to the men's work, and the Wests would lose the washing and charing that maintains them.'

'Then do you think it can never be done? See how nice my plans are!'

'Oh yes! very pretty drawings, but you don't allow much outlet.'

'I thought you had allotments, and that they would do, and I mean to get rid of the pig-sties.'


'A most unpopular proceeding, I warn you.'

'There's nothing more unsanitary than a pig-sty.'

'That depends on how it is kept. And may I ask, do you mean also to dispense with staircases?'

'Oh! I forgot. But do you really mean to say that I can never carry out my improvements, and that these people must live all herded together till everybody is dead?'

'Not quite that,' said the Admiral, laughing; 'but most improvements require patience and a little experience of the temper and habits of the people. There are cottages worse than these. I think two of them have four rooms, and the Wests and Porters do not require so much. If you built one or two elsewhere, and moved the people into them, or waited for a vacant one, you might carry out some of your plans—gradually.'



‘And my fountain?’


‘I am not quite sure, but I am afraid your cottages are on that stratum where you could not bring the water without great expense.’

Arthurine controlled herself enough for a civil ‘Good-morning!’ but she shed tears as she walked home and told her pitying mother that she was thwarted on every side, and that nobody could comprehend her.

The meetings for German reading were, however, contrived chiefly—little as Arthurine guessed it—by the influence of Bessie Merrifield. The two Greville girls and Mr. Doyle’s sister, together with the doctor’s young wife, two damsels from the next parish, and a friend or two that the Arthurets had made at Bonchamp, formed an imposing circle—to begin.

‘Oh, not on *Wilhelm Tell*!’ cried Arthurine. ‘It might as well be the alphabet at once.’

However, the difficulties in the way of books, and consideration for general incompetency, reduced her to *Wilhelm Tell*, and she began with a lecture first on Schiller, and then upon Switzerland, and on the legend; but when Bessie Merrifield put in a word of such history and criticisms as were not in the High School Manual, she was sure everything else



must be wrong—'Fraülein Blumenbach never said so, and she was an admirable German scholar.'

Miss Doyle went so far as to declare she should not go again to see Bessie Merrifield so silenced, sitting by after the first saying nothing, but only with a little laugh in her eyes.

'But,' said Bessie, 'it is such fun to see any person having it so entirely her own way—like Macaulay, so cock-sure of everything—and to see those Bonchamp girls—Mytton is their name—so entirely adoring her.'

'I am sorry she has taken up with those Myttons,' said Miss Doyle.

'So am I,' answered Susan.

'You too, Susie!' exclaimed Bessie—'you, who never have a word to say against any one!'

'I daresay they are very good girls,' said Susan; but they are——'

'Underbred,' put in Miss Doyle in the pause. 'And how they flatter!'

'I think the raptures are genuine gush,' said Bessie; 'but that is so much the worse for Arthurine. Is there any positive harm in the family beyond the second-rate tone?'

'It was while you were away,' said Susan; 'but


their father somehow behaved very ill about old Colonel Mytton's will—at least papa thought so, and never wished us to visit them.'

'He was thought to have used unfair influence on the old gentleman,' said Miss Doyle; 'but the daughters are so young that probably they had no part in it. Only it gives a general distrust of the family; and the sons are certainly very undesirable young men.'

'It is unlucky,' said Bessie, 'that we can do nothing but inflict a course of snubbing, in contrast with a course of admiration.'

'I am sure I don't want to snub her,' said good-natured Susan. 'Only when she does want to do such queer things, how can it be helped?'


It was quite true, Mrs. and Miss Arthuret had been duly called upon and invited about by the neighbourhood; but it was a scanty one, and they had not wealth and position enough to compensate for the girl's self-assertion and literary pretensions. It was not a superior or intellectual society, and, as the Rockstone Merrifields laughingly declared, it was fifty years behindhand, and where Bessie Merrifield, for the sake of the old stock and her meek bearing of her success—nay, her total ignoring of her literary



honours—would be accepted. Arthurine, half her age, and a newcomer, was disliked for the pretensions which her mother innocently pressed on the world. Simplicity and complacency were taken for arrogance, and the mother and daughter were kept upon formal terms of civility by all but the Merrifields, who were driven into discussion and opposition by the young lady's attempts at reformations in the parish.

It was the less wonder that they made friends where their intimacy was sought and appreciated. There was nothing underbred about themselves; both were ladies ingrain, though Arthurine was abrupt and sometimes obtrusive, but they had not lived a life such as to render them sensitive to the lack of fine edges in others, and were quite ready to be courted by those who gave the meed of appreciation that both regarded as Arthurine's just portion.

Mr. Mytton had been in India, and had come back to look after an old relation; to whom he and his wife had paid assiduous attention, and had been so rewarded as to excite the suspicion and displeasure of the rest of the family. The prize had not been a great one, and the prosperity of the family was further diminished by the continual failures of the ne'er-




do-well sons, so that they had to make the best of the dull, respectable old house they had inherited, in the dull, respectable old street of the dull, respectable old town. Daisy and Pansy Mytton were, however, bright girls, and to them Arthurine Arthuret was a sort of realised dream of romance, raised suddenly to the pinnacle of all to which they had ever durst aspire.

After meeting her at a great *omnium gatherum* garden party, the acquaintance flourished. Arthurine was delighted to give the intense pleasure that the freedom of a country visit afforded to the sisters, and found in them the contemporaries her girl nature had missed.

They were not stupid, though they had been poorly educated, and were quite willing to be instructed by her and to read all she told them. In fact, she was their idol, and a very gracious one. Deeply did they sympathise in all her sufferings from the impediments cast in her way at Stokesley.

Indeed, the ladies there did not meet her so often on their own ground for some time, and were principally disturbed by reports of her doings at Bonchamp, where she played at cricket, and at hockey, gave a course of lectures on physiology, presided at a fancy-




dress bazaar for the schools as Lady Jane Grey, and was on two or three committees. She travelled by preference on her tricycle, though she had a carriage, chiefly for the sake of her mother, who was still in a state of fervent admiration, even though perhaps a little worried at times by being hurried past her sober paces.

The next shock that descended on Stokesley was that, in great indignation, a cousin sent the Merri-fields one of those American magazines which are read and contributed to by a large proportion of English. It contained an article called 'The Bide-as-we-bes and parish of Stick-stodge-cum-Cadgerley,' and written with the same sort of clever, flippant irony as the description of the mixed company in the boarding-house on the Lago Maggiore.

There was the parish embowered, or rather choked, in trees, the orderly mechanical routine, the perfect self-satisfaction of all parties, and their imperviousness to progress,—the two squires, one a fox-hunter, the other a general reposing on his laurels,—the school where everything was subordinated to learning to behave oneself lowly and reverently to all one's betters, and to do one's duty in that state of life to which it *has* pleased Heaven to call one,—the

horror at her tricycle, the impossibility of improvement, the predilection for farmyard odours, the adherence to tumbledown dwellings, the contempt of drinking fountains,—all had their meed of exaggeration not without drollery.

The two ancient spinsters, daughters to the general, with their pudding-baskets, buttonholes, and catechisms, had their full share—dragooning the parish into discipline,—the younger having so far marched with the century as to have indited a few little tracts of the Goody Two-Shoes order, and therefore being mentioned by her friends with bated breath as something formidable, 'who writes,' although, when brought to the test, her cultivation was of the vaguest, most discursive order. Finally, there was a sketch of the heavy dinner party which had welcomed the strangers, and of the ponderous county magnates and their wives who had been invited, and the awe that their broad and expansive ladies expected to impress, and how one set talked of their babies, and the other of G.F.S. girls, and the gentlemen seemed to be chiefly occupied in abusing their M.P. and his politics. Altogether, it was given as a lesson to Americans of the still feudal and stationary state of country districts in poor old England.



‘What do you think of this, Bessie?’ exclaimed Admiral Merrifield. ‘We seem to have got a young firebrand in the midst of us.’

‘Oh, papa! have you got that thing? What a pity!’

‘You don’t mean that you have seen it before?’

‘Yes; one of my acquaintances in London sent it to me.’

‘And you kept it to yourself?’

‘I thought it would only vex you and mamma. Who sent it to you?’

‘Anne did, with all the passages marked. What a horrid little treacherous baggage!’

‘I daresay we are very tempting. For once we see ourselves as others see us! And you see ’tis American.’

‘All the worse, holding us, who have done our best to welcome her hospitably, up to the derision of the Yankees!’

‘But you won’t take any notice.’

‘Certainly not, ridiculous little puss, except to steer as clear of her as possible for fear she should be taking her observations. “Bide as we be”; why, ’tis the best we can do. She can’t pick a hole in your mother though, Bess. It would have been hard


to have forgiven her that! You're not such an aged spinster.'

'It is very funny, though,' said Bessie; 'just enough exaggeration to give it point! Here is her interview with James Hodd.'

Whereat the Admiral could not help laughing heartily, and then he picked himself out as the general, laughed again, and said: 'Naughty girl! Bess, I'm glad that is not your line. Little tracts—Goody Two-Shoes! Why, what did that paper say of your essay, Miss Bess? That it might stand a comparison with Helps, wasn't it?'

'And I wish I was likely to enjoy such lasting fame as Goody Two-Shoes,' laughed Bessie, in a state of secret exultation at this bit of testimony from her father.

Mrs. Merrifield, though unscathed, was much more hurt and annoyed than either her husband or her daughter, especially at Susan and Bessie being termed old maids. She *did* think it very ungrateful, and wondered how Mrs. Arthuret could have suffered such a thing to be done. Only the poor woman was quite foolish about her daughter—could have had no more authority than a cat. 'So much for modern education.'



But it was not pleasant to see the numbers of the magazine on the counters at Bonchamp, and to know there were extracts in the local papers, and still less to be indignantly condoled with by neighbours who expressed their intention of 'cutting' the impertinent girl. They were exactly the 'old fogies' Arthurine cared for the least, yet whose acquaintance was the most creditable, and the home party at Stokesley were unanimous in entreating others to ignore the whole and treat the newcomers as if nothing had happened.

They themselves shook hands, and exchanged casual remarks as if nothing were amiss, nor was the subject mentioned, except that Mrs. Arthuret contrived to get a private interview with Mrs. Merrifield.

'Oh! dear Mrs. Merrifield, I am so grieved, and so is Arthurine. We were told that the Admiral was so excessively angry, and he is so kind. I could not bear for him to think Arthurine meant anything personal.'

'Indeed,' said Mrs. Merrifield, rather astonished.


'But is he so very angry?—for it is all a mistake.'

'He laughs, and so does Bessie,' said the mother.

'Laughs! Does he? But I do assure you

Arthurine never meant any place in particular ; she only intended to describe the way things go on in country districts, don't you understand? She was talking one day at the Myttons, and they were all so much amused that they wanted her to write it down. She read it one evening when they were with us, and they declared it was too good not to be published—and almost before she knew it, Fred Mytton's literary friend got hold of it and took it to the agency of this paper. But indeed, indeed, she never thought of its being considered personal, and is as vexed as possible at the way in which it has been taken up. She has every feeling about your kindness to us, and she was so shocked when Pansy Mytton told us that the Admiral was furious.'

'Whoever told Miss Mytton so made a great mistake. The Admiral only is—is—amused—as you know gentlemen will be at young girls' little—little scrapes,' returned Mrs. Merrifield, longing to say 'impertinences,' but refraining, and scarcely believing what nevertheless was true, that Arthurine did not know how personal she had been, although her mother said it all over again twice. Bessie, however, did believe it, from experience of resemblances where she had never intended direct portraiture ;



and when there was a somewhat earnest invitation to a garden party at the Gap, the Merrifields not only accepted for themselves, but persuaded as many of their neighbours as they could to countenance the poor girl. 'There is something solid at the bottom in spite of all the effervescence,' said Bessie.

It was late in the year for a garden party, being on the 2d of October, but weather and other matters had caused delays, and the Indian summer had begun with warm sun and exquisite tints. 'What would not the maple and the liquid amber have been by this time,' thought the sisters, 'if they had been spared.' Some of the *petite noblesse*, however, repented of their condescension when they saw how little it was appreciated. Mrs. Arthuret, indeed, was making herself the best hostess that a lady who had served no apprenticeship could be to all alike, but Arthurine or 'Atty,' as Daisy and Pansy were heard shouting to her—all in white flannels, a man all but the petticoats—seemed to be absorbed in a little court of the second-rate people of Bonchamp, some whom, as Mrs. Greville and Lady Smithson agreed, they had never expected to meet. She was laughing and talking eagerly, and by and by ran up to Bessie, exclaiming in a patronising tone—


‘Oh! my dear Miss Bessie, let me introduce you to Mr. Foxholm—such a clever literary man. He knows everybody—all about everybody and everything. It would be such an advantage! And he has actually made me give him my autograph! Only think of that!’

Bessie thought of her own good luck in being anonymous, but did not express it, only saying, ‘Autograph-hunters are a great nuisance. I know several people who find them so.’

‘Yes, he said it was one of the penalties of fame that one must submit to,’ returned Miss Arthuret, with a delighted laugh of consciousness.

Bessie rejoiced that none of her own people were near to see the patronising manner in which Arthurine introduced her to Mr. Foxholm, a heavily-bearded man, whose eyes she did not at all like, and who began by telling her that he felt as if he had crossed the Rubicon, and entering an Arcadia, had found a Parnassus.

Bessie looked to see whether the highly-educated young lady detected the malaprop for the Helicon, but Arthurine was either too well-bred or too much exalted to notice either small slips, or even bad taste, and she stood smiling and blushing complacently.



However, just then Susan hurried up. 'Bessie, you are wanted. Here's a card. The gentleman sent it in, and papa asked me to find you.'

Bessie opened her eyes. The card belonged to the editor of one of the most noted magazines of the day, but one whose principles she did not entirely approve. What could be coming?

Her father was waiting for her.

'Well, Miss Bessie,' he said, laughing, 'Jane said the gentleman was very urgent in wanting to know when you would be in. An offer, eh?'


'Perhaps it is an offer, but not of *that* sort,' said Bessie, and she explained what the unliterary Admiral had not understood. He answered with a whistle.

'Shall you do it, Bessie?'

'I think not,' she said quietly.

The editor was found waiting for her, with many apologies for bringing her home, and the Admiral was so delighted with his agreeableness as hardly to be able to tear himself away to bring home his wife.

The offer was, as Bessie expected, of excellent terms for a serial story—terms that proved to her what was her own value, and in which she saw education for her sister Anne's eldest boy.



‘Of course, there would be a certain adaptation to our readers.’

She knew what that meant, and there was that in her face which drew forth the assurance.


‘Of course nothing you would not wish to say would be required, but it would be better not to press certain subjects.’

‘I understand,’ said Bessie. ‘I doubt——’

‘Perhaps you will think it over.’

Bessie’s first thought was, ‘If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, then let my right hand forget her cunning.’ That had been the inward motto of her life. Her second was, ‘Little Sam! David’s mission room!’ There was no necessity to answer at once, and she knew the periodical rather by report than by reading, so she accepted the two numbers that were left with her, and promised to reply in a week. It was a question on which to take counsel with her father, and with her own higher conscience and heavenly Guide.

The Admiral, though not much given to reading for its own sake, and perhaps inclined to think ephemeral literature the more trifling because his little daughter was a great light there, was anything but a dull man, and had an excellent judgment. So



Bessie, with all the comfort of a woman still with a wise father's head over her, decided to commit the matter to him. He was somewhat disappointed at finding her agreeable guest gone, and wished that dinner and bed had been offered.

Mrs. Merrifield and Susan were still a good deal excited about Arthurine's complimentary friend, who they said seemed to belong to Fred Mytton, of whom some of the ladies had been telling most unpleasant reports, and there was much lamentation over the set into which their young neighbour had thrown herself.

'Such a dress too!' sighed Mrs. Merrifield.

'And her headmistress has just arrived,' said Susan, 'to make her worse than ever!'

'How comes a headmistress to be running about the country at this time of year?' asked Bessie.

'She has been very ill,' said Mrs. Merrifield, 'and they wrote to her to come down as soon as she could move. There was a telegram this morning, and she drove up in the midst of the party, and was taken to her room at once to rest. That was the reason Miss Arthuret was away so long. I thought it nice in her.'

'Perhaps she will do good,' said Bessie.

Dinner was just over, and the Admiral had settled down with his shaded lamp to read and judge of the

article that Bessie had given him as a specimen, when in came the message, 'Mrs. Rudden wishes to speak to you, sir.'

Mrs. Rudden was the prosperous widow who continued the business in the village shop, conjointly with the little farm belonging to the Gap property. She was a shrewd woman, had been able to do very well by her family, and was much esteemed, paying a rent which was a considerable item in the Gap means. The ladies wondered together at the summons. Susan hoped 'that girl' did not want to evict her, and Bessie suggested that a co-operative store was a more probable peril. Presently the Admiral came back. 'Do any of you know Miss Arthuret's writing?' he said.

'Bessie knows it best,' said Susan.


He showed a letter. 'That is hers—the signature,' said Bessie. 'I am not sure about the rest. Why—what does it mean?'

For she read—

'The Gap, 2d Oct.

'MRS. RUDDEN,—You are requested to pay over to the bearer, Mr. Foxholm, fifty pounds of the rent you were about to bring me to-morrow.—I remain, etc.,

'ARTHURINE ARTHURET.'



‘What does it mean?’ asked Bessie again.

‘That’s just what Mrs. Rudden has come up to me to ask,’ said the Admiral. ‘This fellow presented it in her shop about a quarter of an hour ago. The good woman smelt a rat. What do you think she did? She looked at it and him, asked him to wait a bit, whipped out at her back door, luckily met the policeman starting on his rounds, bade him have an eye to the customer in her shop, and came off to show it to me. That young woman is demented enough for anything, and is quite capable of doing it—for some absurd scheme. But do you think it is hers, or a swindle?’

‘Didn’t she say she had given her autograph?’ exclaimed Susan.

‘And see here,’ said Bessie, ‘her signature is at the top of the sheet of note-paper—small paper. And as she always writes very large, it would be easy to fill up the rest, changing the first side over.’

‘I must take it up to her at once,’ said the Admiral. ‘Even if it be genuine, she may just as well see that it is a queer thing to have done, and not exactly the way to treat her tenants.’

‘It is strange too that this man should have


known anything about Mrs. Rudden,' said Mrs. Merrifield.

'Mrs. Rudden says she had a message this morning, when she had come up with her rent and accounts, to say that Miss Arthuret was very much engaged, and would be glad if she would come to-morrow! Could this fellow have been about then?'

No one knew, but Bessie breathed the word, 'Was not that young Mytton there?'

It was not taken up, for no one liked to pronounce the obvious inference. Besides, the Admiral was in haste, not thinking it well that Mr. Foxholm should be longer kept under surveillance in the shop, among the bread, bacon, cheeses, shoes, and tins of potted meat.

He was then called for; and on his loudly exclaiming that he had been very strangely treated, the Admiral quietly told him that Mrs. Rudden had been disturbed at so unusual a way of demanding her rent, and had come for advice on the subject; and to satisfy their minds that all was right, Mr. Foxholm would, no doubt, consent to wait till the young lady could be referred to. Mr. Foxholm did very decidedly object; he said no one had any right to detain him when the lady's signature was plain, and Admiral



Merrifield had seen him in her society, and he began an account of the philanthropical purpose for which he said the money had been intended, but he was cut short.


‘You must be aware,’ said the Admiral, ‘that this is not an ordinary way of acting, and whatever be your purpose, Mrs. Rudden must ascertain your authority more fully before paying over so large a sum. I give you your choice, therefore, either of accompanying us to the Gap, or of remaining in Mrs. Rudden’s parlour till we return.’

The furtive eye glanced about, and the parlour was chosen. Did he know that the policeman stationed himself in the shop outside?

The dinner at the Gap was over, and Miss Elmore, the headmistress, was established in an arm-chair, listening to the outpouring of her former pupil and the happy mother about all the felicities and glories of their present life, the only drawback being the dullness and obstructiveness of the immediate neighbours.

‘I thought Miss Merrifield was your neighbour—Mesa?’

‘Oh no—quite impossible! These are Merrifields, but the daughters are two regular old goodies, wrapped up in Sunday schools and penny clubs.’



‘Well, that is odd! The editor of the — came down in the train with me, and said he was going to see Mesa—Miss Elizabeth Merrifield.’

‘I do think it is very unfair,’ began Arthurine; but at that moment the door-bell rang. ‘How strange at this time!’

‘Oh! perhaps the editor is coming here!’ cried Arthurine. ‘Did you tell him *I* lived here, Miss Elmore?’

‘Admiral Merrifield,’ announced the parlour-maid.


He had resolved not to summon the young lady in private, as he thought there was more chance of common-sense in the mother.

‘You are surprised to see me at this time,’ he said; ‘but Mrs. Rudden is perplexed by a communication from you.’

‘Mrs. Rudden!’ exclaimed Arthurine. ‘Why, I only sent her word that I was too busy to go through her accounts to-day, and asked her to come to-morrow. That isn’t against the laws of the Medes and Persians, is it?’

‘Then did you send her this letter?’

‘I?’ said Arthurine, staring at it, with her eyes at their fullest extent. ‘I! fifty pounds! Mr. Foxholm! What does it mean?’



‘Then you never wrote that order?’

‘No! no! How should I?’

‘That is not your writing?’

‘No, not that.’

‘Look at the signature.’

‘Oh! oh! oh!’—and she dropped into a chair.

‘The horrible man! That’s the autograph I gave him this afternoon.’

‘You are sure?’

‘Quite; for my pen spluttered in the slope of the A. Has she gone and given it to him?’

‘No. She brought it to me, and set the policeman to watch him.’

‘What a dear, good woman! Shall you send him to prison, Admiral Merrifield? What can be done to him?’ said Arthurine, not looking at all as if she would like to abrogate capital punishment.

‘Well, I had been thinking,’ said the Admiral. ‘You see he did not get it, and though I could commit him for endeavouring to obtain money on false pretences, I very much doubt whether the prosecution would not be worse for you than for him.’

‘That is very kind of you, Admiral!’ exclaimed the mother. ‘It would be terribly awkward for dear Arthurine to stand up and say he cajoled her into

giving her autograph. It might always be remembered against her !’

‘Exactly so,’ said the Admiral ; ‘and perhaps there may be another reason for not pushing the matter to extremity. The man is a stranger here, I believe.’

‘He has been staying at Bonchamp,’ said Mrs. Arthuret. ‘It was young Mr. Mytton who brought him over this afternoon.’

‘Just so. And how did he come to be aware that Mrs. Rudden owed you any money?’

There was a pause, then Arthurine broke out—


‘Oh, Daisy and Pansy can’t have done anything ; but they were all three there helping me mark the tennis-courts when the message came.’

‘Including the brother?’

‘Yes.’

‘He is a bad fellow, and I would not wish to shield him in any way, but that such a plot should be proved against him would be a grievous disgrace to the family.’

‘I can’t ever feel about them as I have done,’ said Arthurine, in tears. ‘Daisy and Pansy said so much about poor dear Fred, and every one being hard on him, and his feeling my good influence—and all the



time he was plotting this against me, with my chalk in his hand marking my grass,' and she broke down in child-like sobs.

The mortification was terrible of finding her pinnacle of fame the mere delusion of a sharper, and the shock of shame seemed to overwhelm the poor girl.

'Oh, Admiral!' cried her mother, 'she cannot bear it. I know you will be good, and manage it so as to distress her as little as possible, and not have any publicity.'

'I will do my best,' said the Admiral. 'I will try and get a confession out of him, and send him off, though it is a pity that such a fellow should get off scot-free.'


'Oh, never mind, so that my poor Arthurine's name is not brought forward! We can never be grateful enough for your kindness.'

It was so late that the Admiral did not come back that night, and the ladies were at breakfast when he appeared again. Foxholm had, on finding there was no escape, confessed the fraud, but threw most of the blame on Fred Mytton, who was in debt, not only to him but to others. Foxholm himself seemed to have been an adventurer, who preyed on young men at the

billiard-table, and had there been in some collusion with Fred, though the Admiral had little doubt as to which was the greater villain. He had been introduced to the Mytton family, who were not particular; indeed, Mr. Mytton had no objection to increasing his pocket-money by a little wary, profitable betting and gambling on his own account. However, the associates had no doubt brought Bonchamp to the point of being too hot to hold them, and Fred, overhearing the arrangement with Mrs. Rudden, had communicated it to him—whence the autograph trick. Foxholm was gone, and in the course of the day it was known that young Mytton was also gone.

The Admiral promised that none of his family should mention the matter, and that he would do his best to silence Mrs. Rudden, who for that matter probably believed the whole letter to have been forged, and would not enter into the enthusiasm of autographs.

‘Oh, thank you! It is so kind,’ said the mother; and Arthurine, who looked as if she had not slept all night, and was ready to burst into tears on the least provocation, murmured something to the same effect, which the Admiral answered, half hearing—



‘Never mind, my dear, you will be wiser another time; young people will be inexperienced.’

‘Is that the cruellest cut of all?’ thought Miss Elmore, as she beheld her former pupil scarcely restraining herself enough for the farewell civilities, and then breaking down into a flood of tears.

Her mother hovered over her with, ‘What is it? Oh! my dear child, you need not be afraid; he is so kind!’

‘I hate people to be kind, that is the very thing,’ said Arthurine,—‘Oh! Miss Elmore, don’t go)—while he is meaning all the time that I have made such a fool of myself! And he is glad, I know he is, he and his hateful, stupid, stolid daughters.’

‘My dear! my dear!’ exclaimed her mother.

‘Well, haven’t they done nothing but thwart me, whatever I wanted to do, and aren’t they triumphing now in this abominable man’s treachery, and my being taken in? I shall go away, and sell the place, and never come back again.’

‘I should think that was the most decided way of confessing a failure,’ said Miss Elmore; and as Mrs. Arthuret was called away by the imperative summons to the butcher, she spoke more freely. ‘Your mother looks terrified at being so routed up again.’

‘Oh, mother will be happy anywhere ; and how can I stay with these stick-in-the-mud people, just like what I have read about?’

‘And have gibbeted! Really, Arthurine, I should call them very generous!’

‘It is their thick skins,’ muttered she ; ‘at least so the Myttons said ; but, indeed, I did not mean to be so personal as it was thought.’

‘But tell me. Why did you not get on with Mesa?’

‘That was a regular take-in. Not to tell one! When I began my German class, she put me out with useless explanations.’

‘What kind of explanations?’

‘Oh, about the Swiss being under the Empire, or something, and she *would* go into parallels of Saxon words, and English poetry, such as our Fraülein never troubled us with. But I showed her it would not *do*.’

‘So instead of learning what you had not sense to appreciate, you wanted to teach your old routine.’

‘But, indeed, she could not pronounce at all well, and she looked ever so long at difficult bits, and then she even tried to correct *me*.’

‘Did she go on coming after you silenced her?’

‘Yes, and never tried to interfere again.’

‘I am afraid she drew her own conclusions about High Schools.’

‘Oh, Miss Elmore, you used to like us to be thorough and not discursive, and how could anybody brought up in this stultifying place, ages ago, know what will tell in an exam.?’

‘Oh! Arthurine. How often have I told you that examinations are not education. I never saw so plainly that I have not educated you.’

‘I wanted to prepare Daisy and Pansy, and they didn’t care about her prosing when we wanted to get on with the book.’

‘Which would have been the best education for them, poor girls, an example of courtesy, patience, and humility, or *getting on*, as you call it?’

‘Oh! Miss Elmore, you are very hard on me, when I have just been so cruelly disappointed.’

‘My dear child, it is only because I want you to discover why you have been so cruelly disappointed.’


It would be wearisome to relate all that Arthurine finally told of those thwartings by the Merrifields which had thrown her into the arms of the Mytton family, nor how Miss Elmore brought her to confess that each scheme was either impracticable, or might have been injurious, and that a little grain of humility

might have made her see things very differently. Yet it must be owned that the good lady felt rather like bending a bow that would spring back again.

Bessie Merrifield had, like her family, been inclined to conclude that all was the fault of High Schools. She did not see Miss Elmore at first, thinking the Arthurets not likely to wish to be intruded upon, and having besides a good deal to think over. For she and her father had talked over the proposal, which pecuniarily was so tempting, and he, without prejudice, but on principle, had concurred with her in deciding that it was her duty not to add one touch of attractiveness to aught which supported a cause contrary to their strongest convictions. Her father's approbation was the crowning pleasure, though she felt the external testimony to her abilities, quite enough to sympathise with such intoxication of success as to make any compliment seem possible. Miss Elmore had one long talk with her, beginning by saying—

‘I wish to consult you about my poor, foolish child.’

‘Ah! I am afraid we have not helped her enough!’ said Bessie. ‘If we had been more sympathetic she might have trusted us more.’



‘Then you are good enough to believe that it was not all folly and presumption.’

‘I am sure it was not,’ said Bessie. ‘None of us ever thought it more than inexperience and a little exaltation, with immense good intention at the bottom. Of course, our dear old habits did look dull, coming from life and activity, and we rather resented her contempt for them; but I am quite sure that after a little while, every one will forget all about this, or only recollect it as one does a girlish scrape.’

‘Yes. To suppose all the neighbourhood occupied in laughing at her is only another phase of self-importance. You see, the poor child necessarily lived in a very narrow world, where examinations came, whatever I could do, to seem everything, and she only knew things beyond by books. She had success enough there to turn her head, and not going to Cambridge, never had fair measure of her abilities. Then came prosperity——’


‘Quite enough to upset any one’s balance,’ said Bessie. ‘In fact, only a very sober, not to say stolid, nature would have stood it.’

‘Poor things! They were so happy—so open-hearted. I did long to caution them. “Full cup, steady hand.”’

‘It will all come right now,’ said Bessie. ‘Mrs. Arthuret spoke of their going away for the winter; I do not think it will be a bad plan, for then we can start quite fresh with them; and the intimacy with the Myttons will be broken, though I am sorry for the poor girls. They have no harm in them, and Arthurine was doing them good.’

‘A whisper to you, Miss Merrifield—they are going back with me, to be prepared for governesses at Arthurine’s expense. It is the only thing for them in the crash that young man has brought on the family.’

‘Dear, good Arthurine! She only needed to learn how to carry her cup.’



MRS. BATSEYES

I

FATHER AND DAUGHTER

SCENE. — *The drawing-room of Darkglade Vicarage.* MR. AVELAND, *an elderly clergyman.* MRS. MOLDWARP, *a widow on the verge of middle age.*

Mr. A. So, my dear good child, you will come back to me, and do what you can for the lonely old man !

Mrs. M. I know nothing can really make up——

Mr. A. Ah ! my dear, you know only too well by your own experience, but if any one could, it would be you. And at least you will let nothing drop in the parish work. You and Cicely together will be able to take that up when Euphrasia is gone too.

Mrs. M. It will be delightful to me to come back to it ! You know I was to the manner born. Nothing seems to be so natural !

Mr. A. I am only afraid you are giving up a great


deal. I don't know that I could accept it—except for the parish and these poor children.

Mrs. M. Now, dear father, you are not to talk so! Is not this my home, my first home, and though it has lost its very dearest centre, what can be so dear to me when my own has long been broken?

Mr. A. But the young folks—young Londoners are apt to feel such a change a great sacrifice.

Mrs. M. Lucius always longs to be here whenever he is on shore, and Cicely. Oh! it will be so good for Cicely to be with you, dear father. I know some day you will be able to enjoy her. And I do look forward to having her to myself, as I have never had before since she was a little creature in the nursery. It is so fortunate that I had not closed the treaty for the house at Brompton, so that I can come whenever Phrasie decides on leaving you.

Mr. A. And she must not be long delayed. She and Holland have waited for each other quite long enough. Your dear mother begged that there should be no delay; and neither you nor I, Mary, could bear to shorten the time of happiness together that may be granted them. She will have no scruple about leaving George's children now you and Cicely will see to them—poor little things!



Mrs. M. Cicely has always longed for a sphere, and between the children and the parish she will be quite happy. You need have no fears for her, father!

II

BROTHER AND SISTER

SCENE.—*The broad walk under the Vicarage garden wall.*

LUCIUS MOLDWARP, a lieutenant in the Navy. CICELY MOLDWARP.

C. Isn't it disgusting, Lucius?

L. What is?

C. This proceeding of the mother's.

L. Do you mean coming down here to live?

C. Of course I do! Without so much as consulting me.

L. The captain does not ordinarily consult the crew.

C. Bosh, Lucius. That habit of discipline makes you quite stupid. Now, haven't I the right to be consulted?

L. (*A whistle.*)

C. (*A stamp.*)

L. Pray, what would your sagacity have proposed for grandpapa and the small children?

C. (*Hesitation.*)

L. (*A slight laugh.*)

C. I do think it is quite shocking of Aunt Phrasie to be in such haste to marry!

L. After eleven years—eh? or twelve, is it?

C. I mean of course so soon after her mother's death.

L. You know dear granny herself begged that the wedding might not be put off on that account.

C. Mr. Holland might come and live here.

L. Perhaps he thinks he has a right to be consulted.

C. Then she might take those children away with her.


L. Leaving grandpapa alone.

C. The Curate might live in the house.

L. Lively and satisfactory to mother. Come now, Cis, why are you so dead set against this plan. It is only because your august consent has not been asked?

C. I should have minded less if the pros and cons had been set before me, instead of being treated like a chattel; but I do not think my education should be sacrificed.

L. Not educated! At twenty!



C. Don't be so silly, Lucius. This is the time when the most important brain work is to be done. There are the art classes at the Slade, and the lectures I am down for, and the Senior Cambridge and cookery and nursing. Yes, I see you make faces! You sailors think women are only meant for you to play with when you are on shore; but I must work.

L. Work enough here!

C. Goody-goody! Babies, school-children, and old women! I'm meant for something beyond that, or what are intellect and artistic faculty given for?

L. You could read for Cambridge exam. all the same. Here are tons of books, and grandpapa would help you. Why not? He is not a bit of a dull man. He is up to everything.

C. So far as *you* know. Oh no, he is not naturally dense. He is a dear old man; but you know clerics of his date, especially when they have vegetated in the country, never know anything but the Fathers and church architecture.

L. Hum! I should have said the old gentleman had a pretty good intelligence of his own. I know he set me on my legs for my exam. as none of the masters at old Coade's ever did. What has made

you take such a mortal aversion to the place? We used to think it next door to Paradise when we were small children.

C. Of course, when country freedom was everything, and we knew nothing of rational intercourse; but when all the most intellectual houses are open to me, it is intolerable to be buried alive here with nothing to talk of but clerical shop, and nothing to do but read to old women, and cram the unfortunate children with the catechism. And mother and Aunt Phrasie expect me to be in raptures!

L. Whereas you seem to be meditating a demonstration.


C. I shall tell mother that if she must needs come down to wallow in her native goodness, it is due to let me board in Kensington till my courses are completed.

L. Since she won't be an unnatural daughter, she is to leave the part to you. Well, I suppose it will be for the general peace.

C. Now, Lucius, you speak out of the remains of the old tyrannical barbarism, when the daughters were nothing but goods and chattels.

L. Goods, yes, indeed, and betters.

C. No doubt the men liked it! But won't you



stand by me, Lucius? You say it would be for the general peace.

L. I only said you would be better away than making yourself obnoxious. I can't think how you can have the heart, Cis, such a pet as you always were.

C. I would not hurt their feelings for the world, only my improvement is too important to be sacrificed, and if no one else will stand up for me, I must stand up for myself.

III

BRIDE-ELECT AND FATHER

SCENE.—*Three weeks later. Breakfast table at Darkglade Vicarage. MR. AVELAND and EUPHRASIA reading their letters. Three little children eating bread and milk.*

E. There! Mary has got the house at Brompton off her hands and can come for good on the 11th. That is the greatest possible comfort. She wants to bring her piano; it has a better tone than ours.

Mr. A. Certainly! Little Miss Hilda there will soon be strumming her scales on the old one, and Mary and Cis will send me to sleep in the evening with hers.

E. Oh!

Mr. A. Why, Phrasie, what's the matter?

E. This is a blow! Cicely is only coming to be bridesmaid, and then going back to board at Kensington and go on with her studies.

Mr. A. To board? All alone?

E. Oh! that's the way with young ladies!

Mr. A. Mary cannot have consented.

E. Have you done, little folks? Then say grace Hilda, and run out till the lesson bell rings. Yes, poor Mary, I am afraid she thinks all that Cecilia decrees is right; or if she does not naturally believe so, she is made to.

Mr. A. Come, come, Phrasie, I always thought Mary a model mother.

E. So did I, and so she was while the children were small, except that they were more free and easy with her than was the way in our time. And I think she is all that is to be desired to her son; but when last I was in London, I cannot say I was satisfied, I thought Cissy had got beyond her.

Mr. A. For want of a father?

E. Not entirely. You know I could not think Charles Moldwarp quite worthy of Mary, though she never saw it.

Mr. A. Latterly we saw so little of him! He



liked to spend his holiday in mountain climbing, and Mary made her visits here alone.

E. Exactly so. Sympathy faded out between them, though she, poor dear, never betrayed it, if she realised it, which I doubt. And as Cissy took after her father, this may have weakened her allegiance to her mother. At any rate, as soon as she was thought to have outgrown her mother's teaching, those greater things, mother's influence and culture, were not thought of, and she went to school and had her companions and interests apart; while Mary, good soul, filled up the vacancy with good works, and if once you get into the swing of that sort of thing in town, there's no end to the demands upon your time. I don't think she ever let them bore her husband. He was out all day, and didn't want her; but I am afraid they do bore her daughter, and absorb attention and time, so as to hinder full companionship, till Cissy has grown up an extraneous creature, not formed by her. Mary thinks, in her humility, dear old thing, that it is a much superior creature; but I don't like it as well as the old sort.

Mr. A. The old barndoor hen hatched her eggs and bred up her chicks better than the fine prize fowl. Eh?

E. So that incubator-hatched chicks, with a hot-bed instead of a hovering wing and tender cluck-cluck, are the fashion! I was in hopes that coming down to the old coop, with no professors to run after, and you to lead them both, all would right itself, but it seems my young lady wants more improving.

Mr. A. Well, my dear, it must be mortifying to a clever girl to have her studies cut short.


E. Certainly; but in my time we held that studies were subordinate to duties; and that there were other kinds of improvement than in model-drawing and all the rest of it.

Mr. A. It will not be for long, and Cissy will find the people, or has found them, and Mary will accept them.

E. If her native instinct objects, she will be cajoled or bullied into seeing with Cissy's eyes.

Mr. A. Well, Euphrasia, my dear, let us trust that people are the best judges of their own affairs, and remember that the world has got beyond us. Mary was always a sensible, right-minded girl, and I cannot believe her as blind as you would make out.

E. At any rate, dear papa, you never have to say to her as to me, 'Judge not, that ye be not judged.'



IV

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER

SCENE.—*Darkglade Vicarage drawing-room.*

Mrs. M. So, my dear, you think it impossible to be happy here?

C. Little Mamsey, why *will* you never understand? It is not a question of happiness, but of duty to myself.

Mrs. M. And that is——

C. Not to throw away all my chances of self-improvement by burrowing into this hole.

Mrs. M. Oh, my dear, I don't like to hear you call it so.

C. Yes, I know you care for it. You were bred up here, and know nothing better, poor old Mamsey, and pottering suits you exactly; but it is too much to ask me to sacrifice my wider fields of culture and usefulness.

Mrs. M. Grandpapa would enjoy nothing so much as reading with you. He said so.

C. Oxford half a century old and wearing off ever

since. No, I thank you! Besides, it is not only physical science, but art.

Mrs. M. There's the School of Art at Holbrook.

C. My dear mother, I am far past country schools of art!

Mrs. M. It is not as if you intended to take up art as a profession.


C. Mother! will nothing ever make you understand? Nothing ought to be half-studied, merely to pass away the time as an *accomplishment* (*uttered with infinite scorn, accentuated on the second syllable*), just to do things to sell at bazaars. No! Art with me means work worthy of exhibition, with a market-price, and founded on a thorough knowledge of the secrets of the human frame.

Mrs. M. Those classes! I don't like all I hear of them, or their attendants.

C. If you *will* listen to all the gossip of all the old women of both sexes, I can't help it! Can't you trust to innocence and earnestness?

Mrs. M. I wish it was the Art College at Wimbledon. Then I should be quite comfortable about you.

C. Have not we gone into all that already? You know I must go to the fountain-head, and not be put off with mere feminine, lady-like studies! Pah!



Besides, in lodgings I can be useful. I shall give two evenings in the week to the East End, to the Society for the Diversion and Civilisation of the Poor.

Mrs. M. Surely there is room for usefulness here! Think of the children! And for diversion and civilisation, how glad we should be of your fresh life and brightness among poor people!

C. Such poor! Why, even if grandpapa would let me give a lecture on geology, or a reading from Dickens, old Prudence Blake would go about saying it hadn't done nothing for her poor soul.

Mrs. M. Grandpapa wanted last winter to have penny readings, only there was nobody to do it. He would give you full scope for that, or for lectures.

C. Yes; about vaccination and fresh air! or a reading of John Gilpin or the Pied Piper. Mamsey, you know a model parish stifles me. I can't stand your prim school-children, drilled in the Catechism, and your old women who get out the Bible and the clean apron when they see you a quarter of a mile off. Free air and open minds for me! No, I won't have you sighing, mother. You have returned to your native element, and you must let me return to mine.

Mrs. M. Very well, my dear. Perhaps a year or two of study in town may be due to you, though this is a great disappointment to grandpapa and me. I know Mrs. Payne will make a pleasant and safe home for you, if you must be boarded.

C. Too late for that. I always meant to be with Betty Thurston at Mrs. Kaye's. In fact, I have written to engage my room. So there's an end of it. Come, come, don't look vexed. It is better to make an end of it at once. There are things that one must decide for oneself.

V


TWO FRIENDS

SCENE.—*Over the fire in Mrs. Kaye's boarding-house.* CECILIA
MOLDWARP and BETTY THURSTON.

C. So I settled the matter at once.

B. Quite right, too, Cis.

C. The dear woman was torn every way. Grandpapa and Aunt Phrasie wanted her to pin me down into the native stodge; and Lucius, like a true man, went in for subjection: so there was nothing for it



but to put my foot down. And though little mother might moan a little to me, I knew she would stand up stoutly for me to all the rest, and vindicate my liberty.

B. To keep you down there. Such a place is very well to breathe in occasionally, like a whale; but as to living in them——

C. Just hear how they spend the day. First, 7.30, prayers in church. The dear old man has hammered on at them these forty years, with a congregation averaging 4 to 2.5.

B. You are surely not expected to attend at that primitive Christian hour! Cruelty to animals!

C. If I don't, the absence of such an important unit hurts folks' feelings, and I am driven to the fabrication of excuses. After breakfast, whatever is available trots off to din the Catechism and Genesis into the school-children's heads—the only things my respected forefather cares about teaching them. Of course back again to the children's lessons.

B. What children?

C. Didn't I explain? Three Indian orphans of my uncle's, turned upon my grandfather—jolly little kids enough, as long as one hasn't to teach them.

B. Are governesses unknown in those parts?

C. Too costly; and besides, my mother was designed by nature for a nursery-governess. She has taught the two elder ones to be wonderfully good when she is called off. 'The butcher, ma'am'; or, 'Mrs. Tyler wants to speak to you, ma'am'; or, 'Jane Cox is come for a hospital paper, ma'am.' Then early dinner, of all things detestable, succeeded by school needlework, mothers' meeting, and children's walk, combined with district visiting, or reading to old women. Church again, high tea, and evenings again pleasingly varied by choir practices, night schools, or silence, while grandpapa concocts his sermon.

B. Is this the easy life to which Mrs. Moldwarp has retired?


C. It is her native element. People of her generation think it their vocation to be ladies-of-all-work to the parish of Stickinthemud-cum-Humdrum.

B. All-work indeed!

C. I did not include Sundays, which are one rush of meals, schools, and services, including harmonium.

B. No society or rational conversation, of course?

C. Adjacent clergy and clergywoman rather less capable of aught but shop than the natives themselves! You see, even if I did offer myself as a



victim, I couldn't do the thing! Fancy my going on about the six Mosaic days, and Jonah's whale, and Jael's nail, and doing their duty in that state of life where it *has* pleased Heaven to place them.

B. Impossible, my dear! Those things can't be taught—if they are to be taught—except by those who accept them as entirely as ever; and it is absurd to think of keeping you where you would be totally devoid of all intellectual food!

VI

SCENE.—*Art Student and distinguished Professor a year later.*
Soirée in a London drawing-room. PROFESSOR DUNLOP
and CECILIA.

Prof. D. Miss Moldwarp? Is your mother here?

C. No; she is not in town.

Prof. D. Not living there?

C. She lives with my grandfather at Darkglade.

Prof. D. Indeed! I hope Mr. and Mrs. Aveland are well?

C. Thank you, *he* is well; but my grandmother is dead.

Prof. D. Oh, I am sorry! I had not heard of his loss. How long ago did it happen?

C. Last January twelvemonth. My aunt is married, and my mother has taken her place at home.

Prof. D. Then you are here on a visit. Where are you staying?

C. No, I live here. I am studying in the Slade schools.

Prof. D. This must have greatly changed my dear old friend's life!


C. I did not know that you were acquainted with my grandfather.

Prof. D. I was one of his pupils. I may say that I owe everything to him. It is long since I have been at Darkglade, but it always seemed to me an ideal place.

C. Rather out of the world.

Prof. D. Of one sort of world perhaps; but what a beautiful combination is to be seen there of the highest powers with the lowliest work! So entirely has he dedicated himself that he really feels the guidance of a ploughman's soul a higher task than the grandest achievement in science or literature. By the bye, I hope he will take up his pen again. It is really wanted. Will you give him a message from me?

C. How strange! I never knew that he was an author.



Prof. D. Ah! you are a young thing, and these are abstruse subjects.

C. Oh! the Fathers and Ritual, I suppose?

Prof. D. No doubt he is a great authority there, as a man of his ability must be; but I was thinking of a course of scientific papers he put forth ten years ago, taking up the arguments against materialism as no one could do who is not as thoroughly at home as he is in the latest discoveries and hypotheses. He ought to answer that paper in the *Critical World*.

C. I was so much interested in that paper.

Prof. D. It has just the speciousness that runs away with young people. I should like to talk it over with him. Do you think I should be in the way if I ran down?

C. I should think a visit from you would be an immense pleasure to him; and I am sure it would be good for the place to be stirred up.

Prof. D. You have not learnt to prize that atmosphere in which things always seem to assume their true proportion, and to prompt the cry of St. Bernard's brother—'All earth for me, all heaven for you.'

C. That was surely an outcome of the time when

people used to sacrifice certainties to uncertainties, and spoil life for the sake of they knew not what.

Prof. D. For eye hath not seen, nor ear heard.

Stranger. Mr. Dunlop! This is an unexpected pleasure!

C. (alone). Well, wonders will never cease. The great Professor Dunlop talking to me quite preachy and goody; and of all people in the world, the old man at Darkglade turning out to be a great physiologist!

VII

TWO OLD FRIENDS

SCENE.—*Darkglade Vicarage study.* MR. AVELAND and
PROFESSOR DUNLOP.

Prof. D. Thank you, sir. It has been a great pleasure to talk over these matters with you; I hope a great benefit.

Mr. A. I am sure it is a great benefit to us to have a breath from the outer world. I hope you will never let so long a time go by without our meeting. Remember, as iron sharpeneth iron, so doth a man's countenance that of his friend.

Prof. D. I shall be only too thankful. I rejoice in the having met your grand-daughter, who encouraged me to offer myself. Is she permanently in town?

Mr. A. She shows no inclination to return. I hoped she would do so after the last competition; but there is always another stage to be mounted. I wish she would come back, for her mother ought not to be left single-handed; but young people seem to require so much external education in these days, instead of being content to work on at home, that I sometimes question which is more effectual, learning or being taught.


Prof. D. Being poured-upon versus imbibing?

Mr. A. It may depend on what amount there is to imbibe; and I imagine that the child views this region as an arid waste; as of course we are considerably out of date.

Prof. D. The supply would be a good deal fresher and purer!

Mr. A. Do you know anything of her present surroundings?

Prof. D. I confess that I was surprised to meet her with Mrs. Eyeless, a lady who is active in disseminating Positivism, and all tending that way.



She rather startled me by some of her remarks ; but probably it was only jargon and desire to show off. Have you seen her lately ?

Mr. A. At Christmas, but only for a short time, when it struck me that she treated us with the patronage of precocious youth ; and I thought she made the most of a cold when church or parish was concerned. I hinted as much ; but her mother seemed quite satisfied. Poor girl ! Have I been blind ! I did not like her going to live at one of those boarding-houses for lady students. Do you know anything of them ?

Prof. D. Of course all depends on the individual lady at the head, and the responsibility she undertakes, as well as on the tone of the inmates. With some, it would be only staying in a safe and guarded home. In others, there is a great amount of liberty, the girls going out without inquiry whether, with whom, or when they return.

Mr. A. American fashion ! Well, they say young women are equal to taking care of themselves. I wonder whether my daughter understands this, or whether it is so at Cecilia's abode. Do you know ?

Prof. D. I am afraid I do. The niece of a friend of mine was there, and left it, much distressed and

confused by the agnostic opinions that were freely broached there. How did your grand-daughter come to choose it?

Mr. A. For the sake of being with a friend. I think Thurston is the name.

Prof. D. I know something of that family; clever people, but bred up—on principle, if it can be so called, with their minds a blank as to religion. I remember seeing one of the daughters at the party where I met Miss Moldwarp.

Mr. A. So this is the society into which we have allowed our poor child to run! I blame myself exceedingly for not having made more inquiries. Grief made me selfishly passive, or I should have opened my eyes and theirs to the danger. My poor Mary, what a shock it will be to her!

Prof. D. Was not she on the spot?

Mr. A. True; but, poor dear, she is of a gentle nature, easily led, and seeing only what her affection lets her perceive. And now, she is not strong.

Prof. D. She is not looking well.

Mr. A. You think so! I wonder whether I have been blind, and let her undertake too much.

Prof. D. Suppose you were to bring her to town for a few days. We should be delighted to have

you, and she could see the doctor to whom she is accustomed. Then you can judge for yourself about her daughter.

Mr. A. Thank you, Dunlop! It will be a great comfort if it can be managed.

VIII

AUNT AND NIECE

SCENE.—*In a hansom cab.* MRS. HOLLAND and CECILIA.

Mrs. H. I wanted to speak to you, Cissy.

C. I thought so!

Mrs. H. What do you think of your mother?

C. Poor old darling. They have been worrying her till she has got hipped and nervous about herself.

Mrs. H. Do you know what spasms she has been having?

C. Oh! mother has had spasms as long as I can remember; and the more she thinks of them the worse they are. I have often heard her say so.

Mrs. H. Yes; she has gone on much too long overworking herself, and not letting your grandfather suspect anything amiss.

C. Nerves. That is what it always is.

Mrs. H. Dr. Brownlow says there is failure of heart, not dangerous or advanced at present, but that there is an overstrain of all the powers, and that unless she keeps fairly quiet, and free from hurry and worry, there may be very serious, if not fatal attacks.

C. I never did think much of Dr. Brownlow. He told me my palpitations were nothing but indigestion, and I am sure they were not!

Mrs. H. Well, Cissy, something must be done to relieve your mother of some of her burthens.

C. I see what you are driving at, Aunt Phrasie; but I cannot go back till I have finished these courses. There's my picture, there's the cookery school, the ambulance lectures, and our sketching tour in August. Ever so many engagements. I shall be free in the autumn, and then I will go down and see about it. I told mother so.

Mrs. H. All the hot trying months of summer without help!

C. I never can understand why they don't have a governess.

Mrs. H. Can't you? Is there not a considerable outgoing on your behalf?

C. That is my own. I am not bound to educate my uncle's children at my expense.

Mrs. H. No ; but if you contributed your share to the housekeeping, you would make a difference, and surely you cannot leave your mother to break down her health by overworking herself in this manner.

C. Why does grandpapa let her do so ?

Mrs. H. Partly he does not see, partly he cannot help it. He has been so entirely accustomed to have all those family and parish details taken off his hands, and borne easily as they were when your dear grandmamma and I were both there at home, that he cannot understand that they can be over much—especially as they are so small in themselves. Besides, he is not so young as he was, and your dear mother cannot bear to trouble him.

C. Well, I shall go there in September and see about it. It is impossible before.

Mrs. H. In the hopping holidays, when the stress of work is over ! Cannot you see with your own eyes how fagged and ill your mother looks, and how much she wants help ?

C. Oh ! she will be all right again after this rest. I tell you, Aunt Phrasie, it is *impossible* at present—*(cab stops)*.

IX

THE TWO SISTERS

SCENE.—*A room in Professor Dunlop's house.* MRS. MOLDWARP
and MRS. HOLLAND

Mrs. H. I have done my best, but I can't move her an inch.

Mrs. M. Poor dear girl! Yet it seems hardly fair to make my health the lever, when really there is nothing serious the matter.

Mrs. H. I can't understand the infatuation. Can there be any love affair?

Mrs. M. Oh no, Phrasie; it is worse!

Mrs. H. Worse! Mary, what can you mean?

Mrs. M. Yes, it *is* worse. I got at the whole truth yesterday. My poor child's faith has gone! Oh, how could I let her go and let her mingle among all those people, all unguarded!

Mrs. H. Do you mean that this is the real reason that she will not come home?

Mrs. M. Yes; she told me plainly at last that she could not stand our round of services. They seem empty and obsolete to her, and she could not feign


to attend them or vex us, and cause remarks by staying away, and of course she neither could nor would teach anything but secular matters. 'My coming would be nothing but pain to everybody,' she said.

Mrs. H. You did not tell me this before my drive with her.

Mrs. M. No, I never saw you alone; besides, I thought you would speak more freely without the knowledge. And, to tell the truth, I did think it possible that consideration for me might bring my poor Cissy down to us, and that when once under my father's influence, all these mists might clear away. But I do not deserve it. I have been an unfaithful parent, shutting my eyes in feeble indulgence, and letting her drift into these quicksands.

Mrs. H. Fashion and imitation, my dear Mary; it will pass away. Now, you are not to talk any more.

Mrs. M. I can't—— (*A spasm comes on.*)



X

AUNT AND NEPHEW

SCENE.—*Six months later, Darkglade Vicarage, a darkened room.* MRS. HOLLAND and LUCIUS.

Mrs. H. Yes, Lucius, we have all much to reproach ourselves with; even poor grandpapa is heart-broken at having been too much absorbed to perceive how your dear mother was overtaken.

L. You did all you could, aunt; you took home one child, and caused the other to be sent to school.

Mrs. H. Yes, too late to be of any use.

L. And after all, I don't think it was overwork that broke the poor dear one down, so much as grief at that wretched sister of mine.

Mrs. H. Don't speak of her in that way, Lucius.

L. How can I help it? I could say worse!

Mrs. H. She is broken-hearted, poor thing.

L. Well she may be.

Mrs. H. Ah, the special point of sorrow to your dear mother was that she blamed herself, for——

L. How could she? How can you say so, aunt?

Mrs. H. Wait a moment, Lucius. What grieved

her was the giving in to Cissy's determination, seeing with her eyes, and not allowing herself to perceive that what she wished might not be good for her.

L. Cissy always did domineer over mother.

Mrs. H. Yes; and your mother was so used to thinking Cissy's judgment right that she never could or would see when it was time to make a stand, and prevent her own first impressions from being talked down as old-fashioned,—letting her eyes be bandaged, in fact.

L. So she vexed herself over Cissy's fault; but did not you try to make Cissy see what she was about?

Mrs. H. True; but if love had blinded my dear sister, Cissy was doubly blinded——

L. By conceit and self-will.

Mrs. H. Poor girl, I am too sorry for her now to use those hard words, but I am afraid it is true. First she could or would not see either that her companions might be undesirable guides, or that her duty lay here, and then nothing would show her that her mother's health was failing. Indeed, by that time the sort of blindness had come upon her which really broke your mother's heart.

L. You mean her unbelief, agnosticism, or what-

ever she chooses to call it. I thought at least women were safe from that style of thing. It is all fashion and bad company, I suppose?

Mrs. H. I hope and pray that it may be so; but I am afraid that it goes deeper than you imagine. Still, I see hope in her extreme unhappiness, and in the remembrance of your dear mother's last words and prayers.

XI

GRANDFATHER AND GRAND-DAUGHTER

A month later. MR. AVELAND and CECILIA.

Mr. A. My dear child, I wish I could do anything for you.

C. You had better let me go back to London, grandpapa.

Mr. A. Do you really wish it?

C. I don't know. I hate it all; but if I were in the midst of everything again, it might stifle the pain a little.

Mr. A. I am afraid that is not the right way of curing it.

C. Oh, I suppose it will wear down in time.

Mr. A. Is that well?

C. I don't know. It is only unbearable as it is; and yet when I think of my life in town, the din and the chatter and the bustle, and the nobody caring, seem doubly intolerable; but I shall work off that. You had better let me go, grandpapa. The sight of me can be nothing but a grief and pain to you.

Mr. A. No; it gives me hope.

C. Hope of what?

Mr. A. That away from the whirl you will find your way to peace.

C. I don't see how. Quiet only makes me more miserable.

Mr. A. My poor child, if you can speak out and tell me exactly how it is with you, I think it might be comfortable to you. If it is the missing your mother, and blaming yourself for having allowed her to overdo herself, I may well share with you in that. I feel most grievously that I never perceived how much she was undertaking, nor how she flagged under it. Unselfish people want others to think for them, and I did not.

C. Dear grandpapa, it would not have been too much if I had come and helped. I know that; but

it is not the worst. You can't feel as I do—that if my desertion led to her overworking herself, Aunt Phrasie and Lucius say that what really broke her down was the opinions I cannot help having. Say it was not, grandpapa.

Mr. A. I wish I could, my dear ; but I cannot conceal that unhappiness about you, and regret for having let you expose yourself to those unfortunate arguments, broke her spirits so that her energies were unequal to the strain that I allowed to be laid on her.

C. Poor dear mother ! And you and she can feel in that way about the importance of what to me seems—pardon me, grandpapa—utterly unproved.

Mr. A. You hold everything unproved that you cannot work out like a mathematical demonstration.

C. I can't help it, grandpapa. I read and read, till all the premises become lost in the cloud of myths that belong to all nations. I don't want to think such things. I saw dear mother rest on her belief, and grow peaceful. They were perfect realities to her ; but I cannot unthink. I would give anything to think that she is in perfect happiness now, and that we shall meet again ; but nothing seems certain to me. All is extinguished.

Mr. A. How do you mean?

C. They—Betty and her set, I mean—laughed at and argued one thing after another, till they showed me that there were no positive grounds to go on.

Mr. A. No material grounds.

C. And what else is certain?

Mr. A. Do you think your mother was not certain?

C. I saw she was; I see you are certain. But what am I to do? I cannot unthink.

Mr. A. Poor child, they have loosed you from the shore, because you could not see it, and left you to flounder in the waves.

C. Well, so I feel it sometimes; but if I could only feel that there was a shore, I would try to get my foothold. Oh, with all my heart!

Mr. A. Will you take my word, dear child—the word of one who can dare humbly to say he has proved it, so as to be as sure as of the floor we are standing on, that that Rock exists; and God grant that you may, in prayer and patience, be brought to rest on it once more.

C. Once more! I don't think I ever did so really. I only did not think, and kept away from what was dull and tiresome. Didn't you read something about 'If thou hadst known——'

Mr. A. 'If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things that belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.' But oh, my dear girl, it is my hope and prayer, not for ever. If you will endure to walk in darkness for a while, till the light be again revealed to you.

C. At any rate, dear grandfather, I will do what mother entreated, and not leave you alone.

XII

Two years later. St. Thomas's Day.

C. Grandpapa, may I come with you on Christmas morning?

Mr. A. You make me a truly happy Christmas, dear child.

C. I think I feel somewhat as St. Thomas did, in to-day's Gospel. It went home to my heart.

Mr. A. Ah, child, to us that 'Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed,' must mean those who are ready to know by faith instead of material tangible proof.

CHOPS

You ask me why I call that old great-grandmother black cat Chops? Well, thereby hangs a tale. I don't mean the black tail which is standing upright and quivering at your caresses, but a story that there will be time to tell you before Charlie gets home from market.

Seven years ago, Charlie had just finished his training both at an agricultural college and under a farmer, and was thinking of going out to Texas or to Canada, and sending for me when he should have been able to make a new home for me, when his godfather, Mr. Newton, offered to let him come down and look after the draining and otherwise reclaiming of this great piece of waste land. It had come to Mr. Newton through some mortgages, I believe, and he thought something might be made of it by an active agent. It was the first time Mr. Newton had shown the least interest in us, though he was a

cousin of our poor mother's; and Charlie was very much gratified, more especially as when he had £150 a year and a house, he thought I might leave the school where I was working as a teacher, and make a home with him.

Yes, this is the house; but it has grown a good deal since we settled down, and will grow more before you come to it for good. Then it was only meant for a superior sort of gamekeeper, and had only six rooms in it—parlour, kitchen, and back kitchen, and three bedrooms above them; but this we agreed would be ample for ourselves and Betsey, an old servant of our mother's, who could turn her hand to anything, and on the break-up of our home had begged to join us again whenever or wherever we should have a house of our own once more.

We have half a dozen cottages near us now; but then it seemed to us like a lodge in a vast wilderness—three miles away from everything, shop, house, or church. Betsey fairly sat down and cried when she heard how far away was the butcher, and it really seemed as if we were to have the inconveniences of colonisation without the honour of it.

However, contrivances made us merry; we made our rooms pretty and pleasant, and as a pony and

trap were essential to Charlie in his work, we were able to fetch and carry easily. Moreover, we had already a fair kitchen garden laid out, and there were outhouses for pigs and poultry, so that even while draining and fencing were going on, we raised a good proportion of our own provisions, and very proud of them we were ; our own mustard and cress, which we sowed in our initials, tasted doubly sweet when we reaped them as our earliest crop.

Mr. Newton had always said that some day he should drop down and see how Charles was getting on, but as he hardly ever stirred from his office in London, and only answered letters in the briefest and most business-like way, we had pretty well left off expecting him.

We had been here about six months, and had killed our first pig—'a pretty little porker as ever was seen,' as Betsey said. It was hard to understand, after all the petting, admiration, and back-scratching Betsey had bestowed on him, how ready she was to sentence him, and triumph in his death ; while I, feeble-minded creature, delayed rising in the morning that I might cower under the bedclothes and stop my ears against his dying squeals. However, when he was no more, the housekeeping spirit

triumphed in our independence of the butcher, while his fry and other delicacies lasted, and Betsey was supremely happy over the saltings of the legs, etc., with a view to the more distant future.

It was a cold day of early spring. I had been down the lanes and brought in five tiny starved primroses with short stems, for which Betsey scolded me soundly, telling me that the first brood of chickens was always the same in number as the first primroses brought into the house. I eked them out with moss in a saucer, and then, how well I remember the foolish, weary feeling that I wished something would happen to break the quiet. We were out of the reach of new books, and the two magazines we took in would not be due for ten long days. I did not feel sensible or energetic enough to turn to one of the standard well-bound volumes that had been Charlie's school prizes, and at the moment I hated my needle-work, both steady sewing and fancy work. It was the same with my piano. I had no new fashionable music, and I was in a mood to disdain what was good and classical. So, as the twilight came on, I sat drearily by the fire, fondling the cat—yes, this same black cat—and thinking that my life at the ladies' college had been a good deal livelier, and that if I had

given it up for the sake of my brother's society, I had very little of that.

The hunt had gone by last week—what a treat it would be if some one would meet with a little accident and be carried in here!

Behold, I heard a step at the back door, and the loud call of 'Kitty! Kitty!' There stood Charlie, as usual covered with clay nearly up to the top of his gaiters—clay either pale yellow, or horrid light blue, according to the direction of his walk. He was beginning frantically to unbutton them, and as he beheld me he cried out, 'Kitty! he's coming!' and before I could say, 'Who?' he went on, 'Old Newton. His fly is working through the mud in Draggletail Lane. The driver hailed me to ask the way, and when I saw who it was, I cut across to give you notice. He'll stay the night to a dead certainty.'

What was to be done? A wild hope seized me that, at sight of the place, he would retain his fly and go off elsewhere for better accommodation.

Only, where would he find it? The nearest town, where the only railway station then was, was eight miles off, and he was not likely to plod back thither again, and the village inn, five miles away, was little more than a pot-house.

No, we must rise to the occasion, Betsey and I, while Charlie was making himself respectable to receive the guest. Where was he to sleep? What was he to eat? A daintily fed, rather hypochondriacal old bachelor, who seldom stirred out of his comfortable house in London. What a guest for us!

The council was held while the gaiters were being unbuttoned. He must have my room, and I would sleep with Betsey. As to food, it was impossible to send to the butcher; and even if I could have sacrificed my precious Dorking fowls, there would have been scant time to prepare them.

There was nothing for it but to give him the pork chops, intended for our to-morrow's dinner, and if he did not like them, he might fall back upon poached eggs and rashers.


'Mind,' called Charlie, as I dashed into my room to remove my properties and light the fire, so that it might get over its first smoking fit,— 'mind you lock up the cat. He hates them like poison.'

It was so long before the carriage appeared, that I began half to hope, half to fear, it was a false alarm; but at last, just as it was perfectly dark, we heard it

stop at the garden gate, and Charlie dashed out to open the fly door, and bring in the guest, who was panting, nervous—almost terrified, at a wild drive, so contrary to all his experiences. When the flyman's demands had been appeased, and we had got the poor old gentleman out of his wraps, he turned out to be a neat, little, prim-looking London lawyer, clean-shaved, and with an indoor complexion. I daresay Charlie, with his big frame, sunburnt face, curly beard, and loud hearty voice, seemed to him like a kind of savage, and he thought he had got among the Aborigines.

After all, he had written to announce his coming. But he had not calculated on our never getting our letters unless we sent for them. He was the very pink of politeness to me, and mourned so much over putting me to inconvenience that we could only profess our delight and desire to make him comfortable.

On the whole, it went off very well. I gave him a cup of tea to warm and occupy him while the upstairs' chimney was coming to its senses ; and then Charles took him upstairs. He reappeared in precise evening dress, putting us to shame ; for Charles had not a dress-coat big enough for him to get into, and



I had forgotten to secure my black silk before abandoning my room.

We could not ask him to eat in the best kitchen, as was our practice, and he showed himself rather dismayed at our having only one sitting-room, saying he had not thought the cottage such a dog-hole, or known that it would be inhabited by a lady; and then he paid some pretty compliment on the feminine hand evident in the room.

We had laid the table before he came down, but the waiting was managed by ourselves, or rather, by Charles, for Mr. Newton's politeness made him jump up whenever I moved; so that I had to sit still and do the lady hostess, while my brother changed plates and brought in relays of the chops from the kitchen. They were a great success. Mr. Newton eyed them for a moment distrustfully, but Betsey had turned them out beautifully—all fair and delicate with transparent fat, and a brown stripe telling of the gridiron. He refused the egg alternative, and greatly enjoyed them and our Brussels sprouts, speaking highly of the pleasure of country fare, and apologising about the good appetising effects of a journey, when Charlie tempted him with a third chop, the hottest and most perfect of all.

I think we also produced a rhubarb tart, and I know he commended our prudence in having no wine, and though he refused my brother's ale, seemed highly satisfied with a tumbler of brandy and water, when I quitted the gentlemen to see to the coffee, while they talked over the scheme for farm-buildings, which Charlie had sent up to him.

When I bade him good-night, a couple of hours later, he was evidently in a serene state of mind, regarding us as very superior young people.

In the middle of the night, Betsey and I were appalled by a tremendous knocking on the wall. I threw on a dressing-gown and made for the door, while Betsey felt for the matches. As I opened a crack of the door, Charlie's voice was to be heard, 'Yes, yes; I'll get you some, sir. You'll be better presently,' interspersed with heavy groans; then, seeing me wide awake, he begged that Betsey would go down and get some hot water—'and mustard,' called out a suffering voice. 'Oh, those chops!'

Poor Mr. Newton had, it appeared, wakened with a horrible oppression on his chest, and at once attributing it to his unwonted meal of pork chops, he had begun, in the dark, knocking and calling with great

energy. Charlie had stumbled in in the dark, not waiting to light a candle, and indeed ours were chiefly lamps, which took time to light. Betsey had hers, however, and had bustled into some clothes, tumbling downstairs to see whether any water were still hot in the copper, Charlie running down to help her, while I fumbled about for a lamp, and listened with awe to the groans from within, wondering which of us would have to go for the doctor.

Up came Charlie, in his shirt sleeves, with a steaming jug in one hand and a lamp in the other. Up came Betsey, in a scarlet petticoat and plaid shawl, her gray locks in curl-papers, and a tallow-candle in hand. The door was thrown open, Charlie observing, 'Now, sir,' then breaking out into 'Thunder and turf!' (his favourite Hibernian ejaculation); 'S s s s s s s!' and therewith, her green eyes all one glare, out burst this cat! She was the nightmare! She had been sitting on the unfortunate man's chest, and all her weight had been laid to the score of the chops!

No doubt she had been attracted by the fire, stolen up in the confusion of the house, remained hidden whilst Mr. Newton was going to bed, and when the fire went out, settled herself on his chest, as it

seems he slept on his back, and it was a warm position.

Probably his knockings on the wall dislodged her ; but if so, imagination carried on the sense of oppression, and with feline pertinacity she had returned as soon as he was still again.

Poor old gentleman ! I am afraid he heard some irrepressible laughter, and it was very sore to him to be ridiculous. His grave dignity and politeness when he came down very late the next morning were something awful, and it must have been very dreadful to him that he could not get away till half the day was over.

So dry and short was he over matters of business that Charles actually thought we might begin to pack up and make our arrangements for emigrating. Grave, dry, and civil as ever, he departed, and I never saw him more, nor do I think he ever entirely forgave me. There did not, however, come any dismissal, and when Charlie had occasion to go up to his office and see him, he was just the same as ever, and acceded to the various arrangements which have made this a civilised, though still rather remote place.

And when he died, a year ago, to our surprise we found that this same reclaimed property was left to

my brother. The consequence whereof you well know, my dear little sister that is to be. Poor old Chops! you had nearly marred our fortunes; and now, will you go with me to my home at the Rectory, or do you prefer your old abode to your old mistress?

THE END

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